

Albanians Ante Portas: Representation of Albanian Migrants in the British Media

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Abstract

The topic of Albanian immigration to the UK recently gained prominence in the British media, evoking sensationalist claims and tropes of Albanians being prone to criminal activities, comprising a majority of people crossing to the UK illegally via the English Channel by small rafts and boats, even emphasising a surge of children born in the UK to Albanian parents. In this article, the authors conducted nominative and predicative discourse analysis in order to identify crucial discursive strategies of the British media's reporting on Albanian immigration in 2022 and 2023. Three representative outlets were considered: left-oriented *The Guardian*, conservative *The Times* and right-wing *The Sun*. Some 200 articles featuring Albania/ns overall were identified and analysed, the majority of which focused on immigration. It is argued that the over-representation of Albanian immigration in the British media and political life reiterates centuries-old prejudices and stereotypes about the Balkans, often presenting Albanians collectively as “intruders”, “criminals”, abusers of public funds, villains in the old threat narrative about the invasion of the British shores, and arguably instrumentalised them as a smokescreen for pressing internal economic and political problems.

Keywords: Albanians, Immigration, Media, United Kingdom, Britain

The Albanian Invasion: The Representation of Albanians in the British media

Albania is a small Western Balkan country with a population of under 2.5 million.¹ Many Albanians also live in the neighbouring countries, primarily in Kosovo (1.5 million, over 90% of the population) and North Macedonia (~600,000 or 30% of the population). Albanians are very prone to immigration due to poverty, economic hardships, traditional mobility, etc., with a staggering 1.65 million people working abroad, most of them (75%) living in neighbouring Greece and Italy, followed by other EU countries and the USA.² Traditionally, only a modest number of Albanians lived in the UK. According to the 2019 statistics, Albanians were the 46th nation by inhabitants' country of birth in the UK.³ Consequently, they attracted little interest from the British media, public and politics in the past.

The UK unofficially became a destination country for Albanians at the end of the 1990s. Following the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 and the expulsion of Albanians from Kosovo, tens of thousands of Kosovo Albanians settled in the UK. The majority of Albanians from Albania who migrated to the UK came in those years from the North of Albania (bordering Kosovo), while the rest of them were already migrants in Italy and Greece and decided to move to UK.⁴ Comparing the available figures from the census records, there were just around 300 Albanians in the UK in 1991. By the end of the 1990s, their number rose to approximately 30,000.⁵ This trend of Albanians coming to the UK continued and accelerated in the 21st century. Already in 2005, the Albanian authorities estimated the number of Albanian migrants residing in the UK at 50,000 people, making the UK their third main destination, after Greece and Italy.⁶ In 2019, according to the UK Office for National Statistics, there were 29,000 people who were born in Kosovo and 47,000 people who were born in Albania living in the United Kingdom.⁷ Some British sources suggested that this number was even higher. In 2015, community leaders in the UK provided an estimation of under 100,000 Albanians living in the UK, mainly in England.⁸ Most recently, the House of Commons' report mentions that "an estimated 140,000 Albanians reside in the UK" but does not clarify where these data come from.⁹ Apparently, since most of the Albanian migration to the UK in recent years has been irregular, accurate data are missing. Nevertheless, it is rather clear that Albanians in the UK are relatively modest in numbers and that a significant portion of them came from Kosovo or third countries such as Greece and Italy.

¹ INSTAT. 2024. *Censi i popullsisë dhe banesave në Shqipëri 2023: Rezultatet Kryesore*. Tirana: INSTAT.

² Domachowska, Agata. 2021. *Albania: The Demographic Crisis and Its Consequences*. *Instytut Europy Środkowej* 352(49/2021), 1-2; Mai, Nicola and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers. 2003. Albanian migration and new transnationalisms. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 29(6), 939-948. On Albanian migration to the UK, see: Kostovicova, Denisa. 2003. The Albanians in Great Britain: Diasporic identity and experience in the educational perspective since 1990. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 5(1), 53-69.

³ Beckford, Martin. 2022. *Albanians are in the top 10 of foreign-born parents giving birth in UK. Data reveals*. *The Daily Mail Online*, 9 August 2022.

⁴ Vathi, Zana. 2010. *New Brits? Migration and settlement of Albanian-origin immigrants in London*. Working Paper. Brighton: Sussex Centre for Migration Research.

⁵ Musabelliu, Marsela. 2022. *Albania social briefing: Albanians migrating to the United Kingdom – perils, deceit, and media portrayal*. *China CEE Institute Weekly Briefing* 54(3), 1-6.

⁶ Government of Albania. 2005. *Migratory Bulletin*. Tirana: Ministry of Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and IOM.

⁷ Balliu, Alesia. 2023. Depopulation of Albania and its movement toward the UK. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 11, 228-242, 236.

⁸ Musabelliu, *Albania social briefing*.

⁹ House of Commons / Home Affairs Committee. 2023. *Asylum and migration: Albania. Second Report of Session 2022-23* (accessed: 25 November 2024), 3.

Meanwhile, the most recent Albanian immigration to the UK saw a surge in people applying for asylum and arriving illegally. Thus, for instance, the number of applications for asylum in the UK submitted by Albanian nationals rose from just 219 and 439 in 2010 and 2011, respectively, over around 2000 in the years 2014-2018, to over 5000 in 2021.¹⁰ In 2022, Albanians submitted 16,000 asylum applications, comprising almost 16% of all applications for asylum in the UK, a clear increase from just 7% in 2018.¹¹ Moreover, while earlier immigrants mostly reached the UK legally, in recent years Albanian illegal immigration soared from just 54 crossings in 2020 and 757 in 2021, to 12,658 (or over ¼ of all crossings) in 2022,¹² but then dropped again below 1,000 in 2023 to just 15 in the first quarter of 2024. Albanians crossing illegally by boat are predominantly adult men who use visa-free travel to the Schengen zone to reach Calais and then be transferred by dinghies to Dover by a trafficking scheme run by smuggling gangs. The journey is done overnight in rubber dinghies and costs 3 to 5,000 Euros. However, while most of these Albanians submitted asylum applications upon arrival, only a handful of those were accepted, but many remained unprocessed by mid-2023.¹³

While the “stories of Albanian migrants making dangerous journeys in small boats across the Channel have regularly hit the headlines since 2018”,¹⁴ recent media frenzy started in early August of 2022 with *The Daily Mail*'s sensationalist article that a leaked military file showed that Albanians constituted 40% of all migrants crossing into the UK illegally via small boats.¹⁵ Throughout 2022 and early 2023, British media became saturated by sensationalist claims and tropes of Albanians posing a threat due to the surge of children born in the UK to Albanian parents, of Albanians being the majority of people crossing the Channel illegally by small rafts and boats, and them being prone to criminal activities. This anti-Albanian frenzy was also stimulated by statements made by the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman and other members of parliament. Braverman portrayed Albanians as a *security and existential threat* to the UK by describing the immigration by small boats as “the invasion on our southern coast”. This statement has been reported by some as particularly inflammatory and as hate speech.¹⁶ Braverman also added another element of the security threat by saying that “Many of them [were] facilitated by criminal gangs, some of them actual members of criminal gangs”. This was backed up by the Channel Threat Commander Dan O'Mahoney about “very harmful, serious and organised criminality in the UK committed by Albanian criminal gangs”,¹⁷ even though later media investigation showed that Albanians act as middlemen and stay away from the main migrant camp in Dunkirk, run by Iraqi-Kurdish smuggling gangs. During this period, British

¹⁰ Walsh, Peter and Kotaro Oriishi. 2023. Albanian asylum seekers in the UK and EU: A look at recent data. *The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford*, 27 April 2023.

¹¹ Walsh and Oriishi, *Albanian asylum seekers*.

¹² Government of the UK / Home Office. 2022. Irregular migration to the UK, year ending 2021. 2022. Home Office official statistics. 24 February 2022 (accessed: 25 November 2024).

¹³ Walsh and Oriishi, *Albanian asylum seekers*.

¹⁴ Holloway, Rhiann. 2022. The vilification of Albanian migrants: Is there more than meets the eye? *Open Access Government*, 23 November 2022.

¹⁵ Hookham, Mark and Matt Powell. 2022. Forty per cent of Channel migrants are from Albania – not a country devastated by war of famine – secret military report reveals. *The Daily Mail Online*, 6 August 2022.

¹⁶ Sandford, Alasdair. 2022. 'Inflammatory': UK interior minister Suella Braverman slammed over migrant 'invasion' remark. *Euronews*, 1 November 2022.

¹⁷ Holloway, *The vilification of Albanian migrants*.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak addressed the Parliament regarding the Albanian illegal migration and declared harsh measures, anti-asylum and anti-immigration policies in the UK.¹⁸

Sampling and Methodology

In this article, we analyse the British media reporting on Albanian immigration in 2022 and 2023, relying on critical discourse analysis methodology.¹⁹ The assumption of the ideological discourse analysis is that the ideology of the writer (or speaker) can be “exposed” through close reading, understanding or systematic analysis since the ideological position is explicitly or involuntarily expressed through language and communication.²⁰ Following previous cognate media analyses,²¹ we performed a basic terms search and conducted a predicative discourse analysis in order to identify predication and nomination labelling of Albanians dominating the UK media during the period 1 January 2022 to 31 March 2023.

According to Reisigl and Wodak,²² nomination – the choice of names or labels – and predication – the attribution of qualities – are crucial discursive constructions or qualifications for representing social actors. They play a vital role in our understanding of individuals, groups, and events and shape our perceptions. The authors define nomination as “discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions”.²³ Nomination involves the choice of terms or labels to refer to individuals, groups, or objects, such as the use of proper nouns, pronouns, or descriptive terms. These terms can have significant consequences for the construction of social reality and the group in question. For example, referring to a group of people as “refugees” or “economic migrants” can evoke altogether different emotional responses and shape our understanding of them. Predication, on its part, is the “discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions (positively or negatively)”.²⁴ It involves the attribution of qualities, features, or characteristics to social actors. This can be done through the use of adjectives, verbs, or other linguistic devices. For instance, describing a person or group as “hardworking” or “lazy”, “contributing”, or “(ab)using benefits” has opposite connotations. Thus, predication strategies can be used to portray individuals or groups in a positive or negative light. In addition, Reisigl and Wodak argue that nomination and predication strategies are often interconnected. The choice of nomination can influence the types of predications that are associated with a particular social actor. For example, if a group is referred to as “terrorists”, it is also likely that negative predications will be attributed to them. By analysing the nomination and predication strategies used in discourse, we can gain insights into how language is used to construct and challenge social identities, reinforce power relations, and shape public opinion.²⁵

¹⁸ Birkinshaw, Patrick. 2024. The Rwanda Bill, boat people and international law. *European Public Law* 30(2), 1-24.

¹⁹ Wodak, Ruth and Michael Meyer (eds.). 2016. *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

²⁰ Van Dijk, Teun. 2015. *Critical discourse analysis*. In *The handbook of discourse analysis*, edited by Tannen, Deobra / Hamilton, Heidi and Deborah Schiffrin. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 466-485.

²¹ See, Balla, Andi / Ejduš, Filip and Megi Llubani. 2013. *Albania and Serbia: Perceptions and reality*. Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies/BCSP; Pavlović, Aleksandar and Jelena Čeriman. 2018. *Albania in the Serbian media*. Belgrade: OSCE Mission to Serbia/EMinS.

²² Reisigl, Martin and Ruth Wodak. 2016. *The discourse historical approach (DHA)*. In *Methods of critical discourse studies*, edited by Wodak, Ruth and Michael Meyer. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 23-61

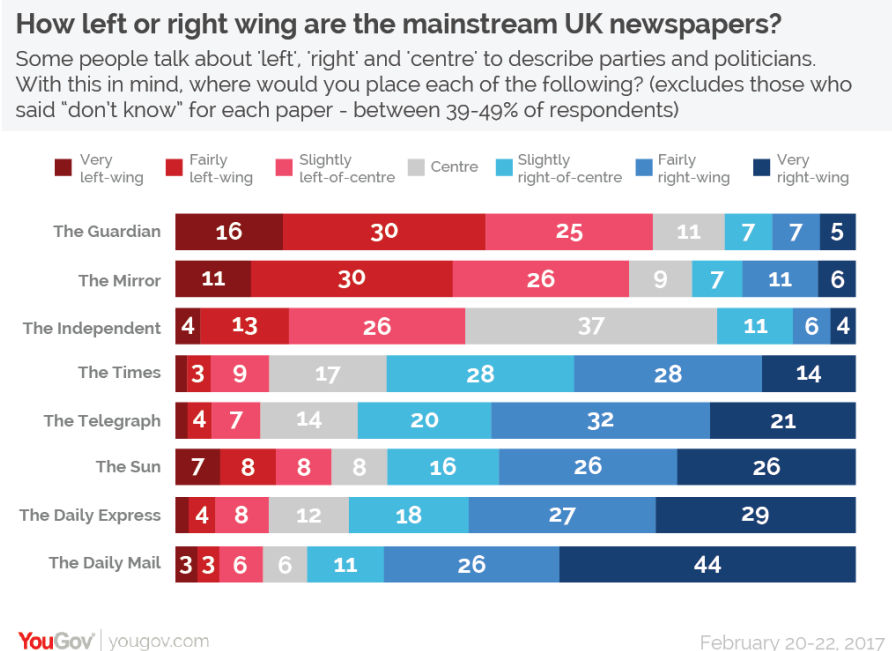
²³ Reisigl and Wodak, *The Discourse Historical Approach*, 33.

²⁴ Reisigl and Wodak, *The Discourse Historical Approach*, 33.

²⁵ Reisigl and Wodak, *The Discourse Historical Approach*, 33-34.

In this article, we deployed the analysis of predication and nomination to expose discursive strategies used by the British media in presenting Albanians in general – and Albanian migrants in particular – dominating the UK media during the period 1 January 1 2022 to 31 March 2023. We analysed the content of three British mainstream media outlets representative of the country’s overall political and ideological spectrum: one newspaper, *The Guardian*, as the most left-oriented, *The Times*, as conservative/centre-oriented, and one tabloid, *The Sun*, as pro-conservative and right-wing. Certainly, these left- or right-wing labels are not the designations that the newspapers typically use for themselves. Some authors situate these outlets somewhat differently on the ideological spectrum, for instance, describing *The Guardian* as “centre-left”.²⁶ Nevertheless, our research was guided by a generally held view about the British media universe where *The Guardian* and *The Sun* stand as antipodes on the left and right respective points of the British media ideological scale, with *The Times* being in the centre. They also differ starkly in their style and type of reporting, with *The Guardian* publishing longer, more in-depth articles, and *The Sun* being more prone to shorter, sensationalist, tabloid-type journalism. Recent YouGov market research presented below illustrates this point and is in line with previous analysis (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Picture 1. Public perception of British Newspapers’ position



Source: Smith, Matthew. 2017. How left or right-wing are the UK’s newspapers? *YouGov*, 7 March 2017.

²⁶ Brownlie, Sioban 2010. *Representing news from France*. In *Political discourse, media and translation*, edited by Schäeffner, Christina and Susan Bassnett. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 32-54, 35.

We specified and limited our search in the following way:

1. focusing our search for the 15 months period – from 1 January 2022, to 31 March 2023.
2. relying on articles available on the web, i.e. published in the online editions of these outlets and relying in all instances solely on the UK editions.
3. conducting a search by using keywords **Albania*, **Albanian* and **Albanians* to determine the overall number of articles mentioning it in both outlets.
4. limiting the search further to include only the articles where Albania/n/s are the main or significant topic.
5. subtracting the number of articles about migrants from the overall number of articles with Albania as a topic.²⁷

Results

After excluding those articles from *The Sun* where this term was marginal, isolated and inconsequential to the flux of the story, 96 articles were identified as relevant. Further examination of the content showed that the issue of Albanian migration occupied a total of 51 articles in *The Sun* during the given timeframe. Meanwhile, *The Guardian* published a total of 44 articles where Albania/n/s is the main or significant topic between January 2022 and March 2023: nine in 2023 and 35 in 2022. Out of the nine articles published on Albania/n/s in 2023, six were about immigration. This effectively means that the issue of Albanian migration dominated 29 out of the 44 articles on Albania/n/s published in *The Guardian* from January 2022 to March 2023. During the same timeframe, *The Times* published 38 articles featuring Albania/n/s, out of which 32 were published in 2022 and the remaining six in 2023. Overall, Albanian immigration issues dominating in as many as 30 out of 38 articles in total (see Table 1).

²⁷ To illustrate this point, the overall number of articles containing the terms Albania/n/s in the given period in *The Sun* tabloid was 263. However, this included dozens of articles mentioning celebrities with Albanian roots, like football players Armando Broja or Granit Xhaka, or musicians Dua Lipa and Rita Ora, as well as results of the football games held in Albania, list of countries participating at the Eurosong, teams competing at the European football championship, or the list of NATO members and the like. However, we excluded all these occasional references as irrelevant or marginal to the main story. In addition, in reporting about individual killings in “the Black Chronicle”, which is *The Sun*’s regular content, in several cases the killers were originally from Albania. However, as this information has been provided in passing, as an isolated information and has not been exploited further in the article, we excluded it as well. In other words, isolated references to Albania unrelated to the content of the story were excluded from our analysis. The exceptions were made when Albania/n/s featured more frequently in both the titles and main body, i.e. when the articles reported in some length about Dua Lipa’s concerts held in Albania, or football matches against the Albanian team, in cases where Broja’s origin and nationality were significant elements of the story content, as well as with articles in which Albania was advertised as a tourist destination (c.f. *The Sun* 28.10.2022, *The Sun*, 22.1.2022, *The Sun* 16.2.2023).

Table 1: The number of articles on Albania/n/s and Albanian immigration in 3 British media (January 2022-March 2023).

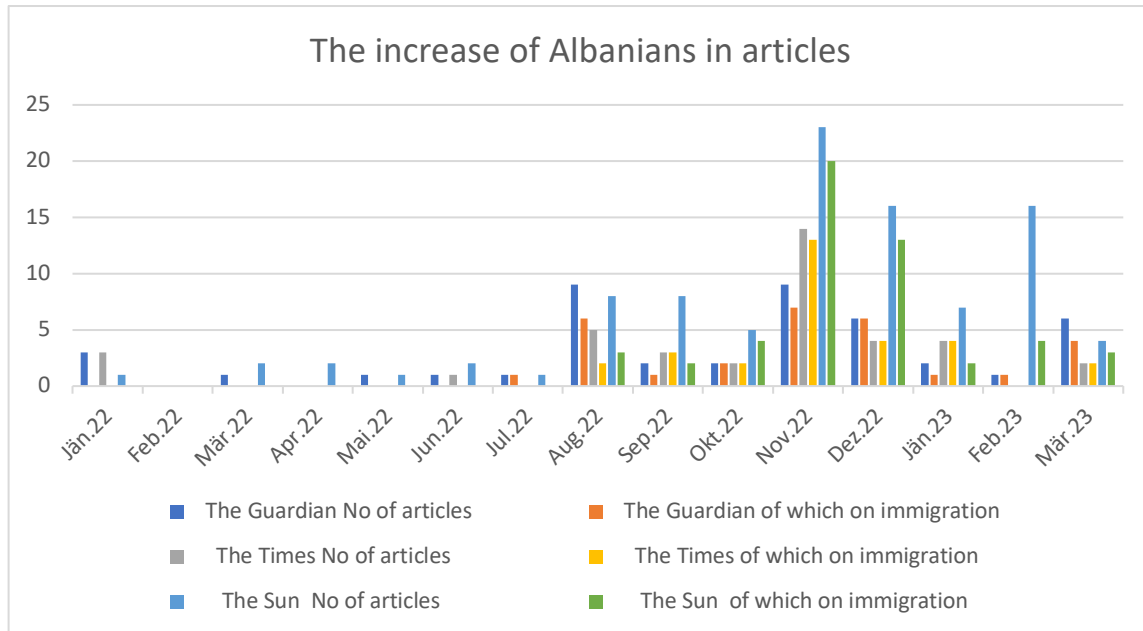
Newspapers Date	The Guardian		The Sun		The Times	
	No of articles	of which on immigration	No of articles	of which on immigration	No of articles	of which on immigration
January 2022	3	0	1	0	3	0
February 2022	0	0	0	0	0	0
March 2022	1	0	2	0	0	0
April 2022	0	0	2	0	0	0
May 2022	1	0	1	0	0	0
June 2022	1	0	2	0	1	0
July 2022	1	1	1	0	0	0
August 2022	9	6	8	3	5	2
September 2022	2	1	8	2	3	3
October 2022	2	2	5	4	2	2
November 2022	9	7	23	20	14	13
December 2022	6	6	16	13	4	4
January 2023	2	1	7	2	4	4
February 2023	1	1	16	4	0	0
March 2023	6	4	4	3	2	2
Total	44	29	96	51	38	30

Source: See the collection of articles [here](#).

Discussion

The analysis showed certain similarities among the two media outlets. Albania and Albanians were practically non-existent as a topic in either of the media from January to July 2022, but rose significantly in August 2022 and later, reaching its peak in November and December of 2022, and then falling again but still maintaining its presence in both media throughout the first quartal of 2023 (see Chart 1).

Chart 1: The increase Albanians in articles from January 2022 to March 2023



Source: Own illustration.

Arguably, the higher number of articles on Albanian immigration in *The Sun* as a tabloid compared to *The Guardian* as a newspaper stems chiefly from their type of reporting in the form of shorter, often repetitive articles, their editorial policy of sensationalism rather than in-depth analysis, but also to some extent to their right-wing political position, all of which resulted in the British tabloid exploiting more the issue of Albanian immigration than the newspaper-type of the media. The starkest difference, however, lies in *how* the two outlets presented the issue of Albanian immigration and Albanian immigrants in particular.

The Sun rarely shines on Albania: Intruders and criminals from a beautiful and prosperous country

The Sun's reporting often contains a major, basic contradiction of simultaneously dismissing Albanians as thugs and intruders and praising Albania as a beautiful and safe country. Thus, while it regularly advertises the Albanian Riviera in the travel section as a holiday paradise for its readers, it also frequently berates Albanians as “thugs” and “criminals” in the politics and comments sections. Such contradiction can be found in the editions of *The Sun*, which are just days apart and sometimes even within the same issue. Thus, while we read in *The Sun's* Travel section that “Albania is one of the poorest countries in Europe”,²⁸ just days later, the readers are informed in the News/Opinion section that Albania is “a safe, prosperous European country”.²⁹ Similarly, in a rather comprehensive coverage of Albania as a tourist destination, which occupied nine articles in February 2023 alone, *The Sun* praised Albania as a safe, hospitable country with

²⁸ Davies, Kieran. 2023. [Mountain High. Is Albania in the EU and what are the entry requirements?](#) *The Sun*, 17 February 2023 (accessed: 25 November 2024).

²⁹ Anderson, Lee. 2023. [Slippery Sir Keir Starmer has no plan to protect our borders — but we do.](#) *The Sun*, 25 February 2023.

little risk to tourists. For instance, one article quotes the government's website *Gov.uk*'s claiming that "public security in Albania is generally good" and that visitors "can expect a very hospitable experience. [...] Crime and violence does occur in some areas, but reports of crime specifically targeting foreigners are rare."³⁰ But that same month, among the articles praising Albania as "European hotspot just like the Maldives"³¹ and "no. 1 European beach holiday destination for cash-stripped Brits – where beer costs £1.10"³², *The Sun* also informs its readers that "Albanian gangsters are 'always one step ahead' as they smuggle vulnerable people into the UK".³³ Even though the article is solely on illegal immigration, the readers are also informed that "the people smugglers operated separately to the Albanian gangs who have seized control of the UK's drug trade over the last 20 years"³⁴ The most striking case is *The Sun* from 13 August 2022 with Albania being portrayed as a "narco-state" from which "thousands of Albanians are flocking to the UK in dinghies – only to end up in the clutches of drug gangs"³⁵, and simultaneously as "a stunning country" with "pristine beaches and cheap booze", "stunning mountains, cute villages, turquoise waters".³⁶

One wonders where are then all those thousands of "criminal" Albanians coming from, and how come these welcoming people from a safe and prosperous country are at the same time criminals? In effect, when Albanians are *there*, their country is exotic, attractive, affordable, hospitable, and safe for UK citizens, whose riviera is "a slice of paradise" with a "Bora Bora feel"³⁷, paradise on Earth, "the European Maldives", "with beautiful beaches and £3 cocktails".³⁸ Once they are *here* or wish to come *here*, they become thugs, gangsters, "monsters", "crooks", abusers of public funds, drug dealers and the like, who abuse the British legal system and live comfortably off the taxpayers' money. *The Sun* repeatedly uses a self-designated name of one London gang: "Hellbanianz", for Albanian criminals and beyond in general³⁹, and readily reports that the "Albanian crews rule the drug underworld in the UK" and that "drugs barons trained up Albanian gangsters to flood the UK".⁴⁰ In both the article title and body, *The Sun* refers to Albanian immigration as "narco invasion"⁴¹ and Albania as a "narco-state"⁴², describing the immigrants as "many living in taxpayer-funded homes and receiving cash hand-outs while

³⁰ Bruder, Shanine. 2023. [Al be there: Is it safe to go on a holiday to Albania in 2023?](#) *The Sun*, 16 February 2023.

³¹ Brotherton, Hope. 2023. [Sea you there: The European hotspot just like the Maldives – and flights are just £27.](#) *The Sun*, 17 February 2023.

³² Godfrey, Kara. 2023. [Hol Yeah: The no.1 European beach holiday destination for cash-strapped Brits – where beer costs £1.10 & hotels are £20.](#) *The Sun*, 6 February 2023.

³³ Duffy, Tom. 2023. [Gang Strife: Albanian gangsters are 'always one step ahead' of the UK and have found two NEW ways to smuggle in migrants.](#) *The Sun*, 5 February 2023.

³⁴ Duffy, *Gang strife*.

³⁵ Culliford, Graeme. 2022. ['Narco state' How Albanians flocking to UK in dinghies end up in clutches of drug gangs as king pins drive Maseratis.](#) *The Sun*, 13 August 2022.

³⁶ Fuller, Alice. 2022. [Budget Paradise: TikTok trend sends holiday bargain-hunters flocking to very unexpected destination with pristine beaches and £1.70 wines.](#) *The Sun*, 13 August 2022.

³⁷ Brotherton, *Sea you there*.

³⁸ Morris, Lauren. 2023. [See EU there! European holiday destination with beautiful beaches and £3 cocktails – and flights are less than £30 too.](#) *The Sun*, 20 January 2023.

³⁹ Parker, Nick. 2023. [Getaway car: Albanian crook kicked out of UK poses in front of £70k Lamborghini as he flaunts wealth after sneaking back into country.](#) *The Sun*, 1 February 2023.

⁴⁰ Southgate, Ed. 2023. [Narco invasion: How cartel drugs barons 'trained' Albanian gangs to flood UK with cocaine – thanks to 'crucial' secret link.](#) *The Sun*, 23 January 2023.

⁴¹ Southgate, *Narco invasion*.

⁴² Culliford, *Narco state*.

working illegally”⁴³. Furthermore, even though this article mentions that “[t]he vast majority of the people who arrive by boat do not have criminal records”, it nevertheless singles out one Albanian “thug” who murdered his wife back home and now “runs a cash-in-hand car wash... while claiming benefits and fighting for asylum through the courts with taxpayer-funded legal aid.”⁴⁴

The approach employed by *The Sun* could be described as *pars pro toto* or a synecdoche, where an isolated, extreme case is generalised to serve the whole category. Thus, *The Sun* reports about a specific gang, *The Hellbanianz*, “who are based on the Gascoigne Estate in Barking, East London”⁴⁵, but then adopts this slur, pejorative name to all Albanians related to the drug business. After this first step of generalisation, where a specific gang serves as a representative for the whole category, another second step is made, where now connections are drawn between the Albanians related to drugs and *all* Albanians in the UK: “Thousands of Albanians arrived in the UK in the late 1990s and early 2000s during a refugee crisis. They first made their mark in Soho’s sex trade, where veteran Met detectives were shocked by the routine violence they handed out to the vulnerable girls they controlled. Police sources have told how in the early 2000s they fought against Jamaican and Chinese drug gangs for control of London, to then penetrate all levels of the UK’s £5billion cocaine trade.”⁴⁶ Apparently, the collective pronoun “they” in both the second and third sentence applies to the subject of the first sentence “Thousands of Albanians”, thus effectively claiming that Albanians who arrived to the UK *en masse* were all involved in the sex trade, and then collectively switched to drugs. Another contradiction is that the said *Hellbanianz* are “surrounded by wads of cash, jewellery and flash motors” and “traffic millions of pounds” but live in rather embarrassing council flats in the *Only Fools and Horses* Peckham’s style housing blocks (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The alleged home of the Hellbanianz. The caption reads: “The Gascoigne Estate tower blocks Barking, London, home to an Albanian street crew of drug dealers.”



Source: Duffy, Tom. 2023. Taking over: How Albanian gangsters are running their bloodthirsty drugs network across UK... but there’s a city they can’t touch. *The Sun*, 13 January 2023.

⁴³ Pollard, Chris. 2023. Monsters in our midst: Hundreds of migrants who sneaked into Britain are criminals – including murderers, terrorists and rapists. *The Sun*, 19 January 2023.

⁴⁴ Pollard, *Monsters*.

⁴⁵ Duffy, Tom. 2023. Taking over: How Albanian gangsters are running their bloodthirsty drugs network across UK... but there’s a city they can’t touch. *The Sun*, 13 January 2023.

⁴⁶ Duffy, *Taking over*.

Instances where migrants are portrayed as victims in *The Sun* are extremely rare. In one article, *The Sun* reports about four migrants dying while trying to cross the Channel after their dinghy capsized, and mentions in particular “a boy named Denis from northern Albania. He is well but traumatised.”⁴⁷

The Times

The Times' prevailing style of reporting could be described as ambiguous and creating the appearance of objectivity. Hence, its articles generally tend to contain views from various sides and abstain from providing remarks overly favouring one perspective. However, *The Times* falls short in terms of objectivity in several respects, the most clearly in its sensationalist and judgemental titles such as: “Albanian gangsters exploit slavery laws to pose as victims”⁴⁸; “Crossing the Channel is easy, says Albanian child in TikTok advert”⁴⁹; “Thousands of Albanians crossing the Channel ‘to bolster crime gangs’”⁵⁰. This inflammatory language can also be observed in the body of these articles, where the terms “criminals” and “Albanians” are used jointly in statements such as “Albanian criminals are blatantly manipulating modern slavery and trafficking laws to claim they are victims while sending home hundreds of millions of pounds in ill-gotten cash” or “Drug runners, cannabis growers and criminal enforcers are being ‘coached’ to tell police that they have been exploited in an effort to persuade the authorities to offer them support instead of putting them in prison.”⁵¹ *The Times* also reports on Home Office statistics, focusing especially on the high number of Albanians incoming:

*A record of at least 13,000 Albanians entered the UK on small boats last year — just under a third of all arrivals — compared to 50 in 2020 and 800 in 2021. From May to September, Albanians accounted for 42 per cent of crossings, according to official data. But the Home Office claims this peaked at 60 per cent on some of the busiest days last summer.*⁵²

These numbers are a repetition of another article from the month before: “More than 13,000 Albanians have crossed the Channel in small boats this year, up from 800 last year. There were 50 in 2020.”⁵³

Actually, according to the official Home Office statistics data, Albanians made up 28%, not “42” or “60” per cent of all migrants who came by boat in 2023, totalling 12,301. Apart from the period May-October 2022, Albanians never before (nor after) featured prominently as illegal migrants arriving by boat. No mention is made of the facts that from “October to December 2022, only 9% of small boat arrivals were Albanian (1,099)”,⁵⁴ or that “Just 29 Albanians crossed The Channel

⁴⁷ Howes, Scarlet. 2022. [Ticket to death: Migrants paid £5,000 each for place on people smugglers’ dinghy that capsized killing four](#). *The Sun*, 14 December 2022.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, Fiona. 2022. [Albanian gangsters exploit slavery laws to pose as victims](#). *The Times*, 15 November 2022.

⁴⁹ Dathan, Matt. 2022. [Crossing the Channel is easy, says Albanian child in TikTok advert](#). *The Times*, 24 September 2022.

⁵⁰ Dathan, Matt. 2022. [Thousands of Albanians crossing the Channel ‘to bolster crime gangs’](#). *The Times*, 26 August 2022.

⁵¹ Hamilton, *Albanian gangsters*.

⁵² Gadher, Dipesh. 2023. [Albanian migrants abandon small boat crossings](#). *The Times*, 15 January 2023.

⁵³ Dathan, Matt. 2022. [Criminals among 42 deported Albanian migrants](#). *The Times*, 23 December 2022.

⁵⁴ Government of the UK / Home Office. 2023. [Irregular migration to the UK, year ending 2022](#). 23 February 2023 (accessed: 25 November 2024).

by boat during the first three months of 2023”.⁵⁵ Apparently, presenting certain data while leaving out others gives a rather distorted picture overall and conforms with a message of the “Albanian threat” on the British shores.

While *The Times* avoids overtly criticising the government, it does give accounts of its criticism from the Albanian side, mainly from the PM Edi Rama.⁵⁶ However, its objectivity is blurred in the comments implicitly criticising the Albanian PM. For example, reporting on Rama’s criticism of the language used by the UK government, *The Times* writes: “His intervention was a blow to ministers’ efforts to strike a rapid returns deal with Albania under which migrants would routinely be deported to Tirana within days of arriving in Britain”. It followed a similar style to the Albanian ambassador in the UK Qirjako Qirko. While the article quotes Qirko’s statement that “children were being bullied at school ‘only because they are Albanians’ as a result of the ‘wave of activity’”, it does not hesitate to paint the Albanian government as unable to control their migration outflow in statements such as: “When asked what action was being taken by his country to shut down social media posts advertising Channel crossings, he said that the Albanian government could not ‘control TikTok or Facebook’”.⁵⁷

In one of the articles, the Home Office minister, Robert Jenrick, was accused by the Albanian minister, Olta Xhacka, of verbally attacking Albania after he released a promotional video that praised efforts to identify and detain illegal immigrants and declaring “open season” on them.⁵⁸ In the same article, *The Times* does not comment on Jenrick’s statement. Still, it included a quote where an unidentified government spokesperson says, “We value our Albanian community in the UK and continue to welcome Albanians who travel here legally and contribute significantly to British society”.⁵⁹

The Times also reported on the victims, focusing on women and minors.⁶⁰ This article describes the journey of the mother and her daughter and the reasons why they left Albania: “[S]he is fleeing a violent ex-husband and left Albania to maintain the safety of herself and her daughter”, but at the same time, focuses on the treatment the illegal migrants are getting by quoting: “She describes the hotel they are living in as ‘five-star’” and also adding “such treatment is one of the reasons she decided to risk everything on the journey”.⁶¹ *The Times* also reiterates the home office and the government narrative that “Albanians are increasingly claiming to be victims to avoid deportation”.⁶² Again, no mention is made of the fact that “in 2021 and 2022, almost half of UK initial decisions on Albanian asylum applications were positive”, thus confirming that even

⁵⁵ Taylor, Alice. 2023. Significant drop in Albanians crossing the Channel in 2023. *Euractive*, 23 April 2023.

⁵⁶ Campbell, Matthew. 2022. Edi Rama: Albanian PM who’s Blair’s buddy and blames Brexit for migrant exodus. *The Times*, 13. November 2022.

⁵⁷ Swinford, Steven. 2022. Albanian migrants ‘lured across English Channel by TikTok videos’. *The Times*, 8 December 2022.

⁵⁸ Ledwith, Mario. 2023. Robert Jenrick accused of ‘lynching’ Albania. *The Times*, 16 January 2023.

⁵⁹ Ledwith, Robert Jenrick.

⁶⁰ Keogh, Glen and Daniel Hugo. 2022. Journey of an Albanian migrant: ‘I thought I was saving my daughter — I nearly drowned her’. *The Times*, 27 November 2022.

⁶¹ Keogh and Hugo, Journey.

⁶² Dathan, Matt. 2022. Suella Braverman wants Albanian migrants who cross Channel in small boats on fast track to deportation. *The Times*, 28 November 2022.

the UK asylum authorities do perceive and classify many of the Albanian migrants as indeed being the victims.⁶³

The Guardian: Albanians as victims and scapegoats of a failed government policy

The Guardian's overall reporting on the issue of migration concerning Albanian nationals could be generally described as balanced: this newspaper critically analysed in some detail the new government's anti-migration measures, included certain quotes from the immigrants and immigration activists themselves, reported about the public protests of the Albanian community in the UK against the collective portrayal of Albanians as intruders and criminals, and provided the space for prominent Albanian voices such as LSE professor Lea Ypi. The three chief tropes or narrative lines pursued by *The Guardian* on these issues could be described as sensitivity towards the Albanian illegal migrants as victims, presenting Albanians as scapegoats of a failed conservative policy, and exposing the Tory's policy shortcomings, failures and harshness.

As presented in Table 1, there were no articles on Albanian migration to the UK in the first half of 2022. In July, a steep increase in the number of illegal Albanian migrants arriving by boats on the shores of Dover has been recorded. While *The Guardian* recognised that it is true that Albania is a poor country with political instability, they also advocated focusing on individual cases and pointed out that many Albanians *are* hardworking and contribute positively to the UK's economy, which reflects their acculturation in British society. Thus, in July, *The Guardian's* journalists Emily Dugan and Diane Taylor wrote about the perils of Albanian children who were trafficked to the UK and granted leave to remain, only to face legal limbo at the age of 18 and risk deportation. "Just 2% of child trafficking victims are given discretionary leave to remain, which they are entitled to under international law", inform the journalists, and then focus on the destiny of an Albanian boy, Samet, whose asylum claim has been denied, which effectively disables him to study or work for years now. "It's a bit like he's been put in a freezer. His life has stopped", Samet's foster carer John Stokes is quoted saying.⁶⁴ This is only one of several examples of focusing on Albanian immigrants as victims. Another article from February 2023 voiced the views of David Neale, legal support worker, providing a first-hand account of the perils that many Albanian children seeking asylum go through and accusing the British government of "demonising Albanian asylum seekers".⁶⁵ The most recent one focused particularly on Albanian young men who were exploited after their arrival to the UK.⁶⁶ The article reports that young Albanian men who have arrived in the UK seeking a better life are being viciously exploited by criminal gangs. Many of these men have been promised work and a new life but instead find themselves forced to work long hours for little or no pay and are subjected to physical and emotional abuse. The article notes that this issue is not new but that it has been exacerbated by the current political climate in the UK, which has made it more difficult for migrants to access support and protection. Thus, *The Guardian* has managed to emphasise that beyond the governmental policies, the Home Office statistics, and various

⁶³ Walsh and Oriishi, *Albanian asylum seekers*.

⁶⁴ Dugan, Emily and Diane Taylor. 2022. Farah case highlights fate of less famous victims of trafficking. *The Guardian*, 14 July 2022.

⁶⁵ Neale, David. 2023. Albanian children come to Britain for safety. Instead, they get Home Office cruelty. *The Guardian*, 8 February 2023.

⁶⁶ Gentleman, Amelia. 2023. Young Albanian men 'viciously exploited' after arriving in UK. *The Guardian*, 5 March 2023.

criticism on all sides, there is a part of the discussion that should be reserved for the victims of the whole matter.

Thereby, *The Guardian* does not assume a sensationalist perspective on this issue and adopts an attitude against scapegoating Albanians. This stanza is clearly displayed in its editorial over the unfairness behind scapegoating chiefly Albanians in the current asylum challenges faced by the UK government in August.⁶⁷ While acknowledging that the surge from 23 to 2,165 Albanians arriving over the Channel in January-June 2021 and 2022, respectively, “merits attention”, editors describe the cooperation with France as “essential” and call for an “increased cooperation with Albanian authorities”, condemning “the government’s deal with Rwanda to send asylum seekers there” and “a Little England mindset adopted for narrowly political purposes”. In addition, the editorial reminds us of the necessity to uphold international laws and UN conventions that protect human rights, refugees and asylum seekers and calls for a more nuanced approach to asylum policy that considers the individual circumstances of these illegal immigrants rather than simply demonising a whole nation. *The Guardian* also published a cognate opinion piece by an Albanian-born UK scholar, Lea Ypi, who claims that “We Albanians are just the latest scapegoats for Britain’s failing ideological project” and argues that labelling Albanians as “invaders” perpetuates a harmful narrative that overlooks the complex historical and political context of Albania and its people.⁶⁸ Ypi also draws attention to the fact that there are already 140.000 well-integrated Albanians in the UK, and if all are categorised as migrants, this undermines their individual differences and contribution to British society. The use of such aggressive language creates a narrative of “us” versus “them”, which divides the society.

The Guardian thus typically employed harsh criticism of the conservative government’s policy and claims, labelling it as “propaganda”, and provides lengthy quotes from Albanian PM Edi Rama about the UK government “discriminating” and “demonising” the Albanians. For instance, an opinion piece from August argues that the Home Office is promoting “propaganda” about migrants in the UK rather than providing factual information.⁶⁹ The author, Kenan Malik, criticises “common wisdom” of illegal immigrants being “the scammers jumping the queue and that they deserve locking up and deportation” by showing that the government is using misleading statistics and inflammatory language to demonise migrants and incite fear among the public. Malik also exposes the inter-governmental deal on the rapid removal of Albanians. Apparently, as Malik points out, over two-thirds of Albanian asylum claims were accepted or upheld by British courts, thus showing that Albania is effectively not “a safe and prosperous country” as claimed by Home Secretary Priti Patel and Albanian Interior Affairs Minister Bledi Çuçi. Similar points are found in other articles in *The Guardian* as well.⁷⁰

During the height of the anti-Albanian frenzy in November, *The Guardian* informs that the British Home Secretary “angered many Albanians” with a comment made in the Parliament by

⁶⁷ The Guardian. 2022. [The Guardian view on asylum challenges: Don’t scapegoat Albanians](#). *The Guardian*, 28 August 2022.

⁶⁸ Ypi, Lea. 2022. [We Albanians are just the latest scapegoats for Britain’s failing ideological project](#). *The Guardian*, 4 November 2022.

⁶⁹ Malik, Kenan. 2022. [There are lies, damn lies, and then there is Home Office propaganda about migrants](#). *The Guardian*, 28. August 2022.

⁷⁰ Freedland, Jonathan. 2023. [Gary Lineker spoke his mind. Now we should too: fate could have put any one of us in those migrant boats](#). *The Guardian*, 10 March 2023.

the Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, about Albanians as criminals and about the “invasion” of the British shores. In response, *The Guardian* focused on the replies of the Albanian side, in particular that of the Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama and scholar Lea Ypi. Rama critically remarked that the “UK should fight the crime gangs of all nationalities and stop discriminating [against] Albanians to excuse policy failures” and reminded that there are 140,000 Albanians in the UK, most of them hard-working citizens with EU passports who came there from Greece and Italy. Rama further dismissed Braverman’s comments as easy rhetoric that targets Albanians as the main culprit, but cannot deny the fact that the UK government is to blame for their own policy failures. Finally, *The Guardian* also went a step further, showing that Albanian politicians are frustrated by the UK’s inability to implement the abovementioned agreement on fast-track deportations of Albanians, while similar deals that Albania made with France and Germany are functioning rather well.⁷¹ *The Guardian* also provided considerable space to Rama during his visit to the UK in late March to repeat similar claims about Braverman’s comments being “a very, very disgraceful moment for British politics”, “low point”, and “refus[ing] to have this mix between some criminals and the Albanians as such”.⁷²

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the reporting done by UK newspapers and identify key tropes implemented in reporting Albanian migrants. The recent anti-Albanian media frenzy in the UK media was approached through a framework of a threat narrative, with a particular focus on nomination and predication strategies through which social actors, events, etc., are constructed and qualified. The aim of the analysis was to recognise these discursive strategies dominating in the UK media during 2022- early 2023 that construct Albanian migrants in particular – and by extension, the Albanians in general – as security, existential, economic and demographical threats. We conducted the analysis in the left-wing newspapers *The Guardian*, centre-right newspaper *The Times*, and the right-wing tabloid *The Sun* from January 2022 to March 2023.

The main tropes used by the British government were gaining back control and protecting/controlling our borders, both of which featured prominently in the pre- and post-Brexit British political discourse. Arguably, this issue of *control* launched a comparatively marginal issue of immigration of a still comparatively small Albanian community in the UK into the political orbit: with the UK’s economy suffering heavily from both Brexit and failed experiments of the previous Tory government of Liz Truss, the conservatives desperately needed to prove their readiness and ability to fulfil the second main promise of their pro-Brexit policy: taking back control of the British borders. The two media outlets used starkly different tropes in their reporting. *The Guardian* presented Albanian illegal immigrants as victims suffering from human trafficking, repressive policing and criminal gangs trying to exploit and recruit them, as well as scapegoats and usual suspects of a failed government policy. In distinction, *The Sun* portrayed the Albanian migrants as intruders and criminals and, by extension, implied a grim picture of the entire Albanian community as little more than smugglers, human traffickers,

⁷¹ Syal, Rajeev and Aina J Khan. 2022. [Britain is targeting Albanians to excuse policy failures, says country’s PM](#). *The Guardian*, 2 November 2022.

⁷² Topping, Alexandra. 2023. [Albanian PM hits out at Braverman over ‘disgraceful’ comments on migrants](#). *The Guardian*, 23 March 2023.

criminals, drug dealers, and abusers of British social benefits and its welfare system. Moreover, *The Sun* welcomed the new British leaders as hardliners, demanding and welcoming harsh policy measures without consideration of personal and collective human rights or of the actual ethical and legal consequences or repercussions of such policy. In addition, even though Albanian politicians repeatedly held inter-governmental meetings and joint press conferences in London, their statements were related only occasionally and fragmentary in both outlets and were also berated and dismissed by *The Sun*. This effectively positioned the Albanian government not as actors but as subjects and subordinates of the British policy. Regarding *The Times*, the type of reporting employed by them could be described as creating an appearance of objectivity by typically providing statements from both sides and avoiding judgemental and dismissive remarks so frequently present in *The Sun*. However, *The Times*'s negative representation of the Albanian migration becomes apparent when one looks at how their reporting is *framed*. Namely, this outlet uses visibly inflammatory and sensationalist titles for their articles on the Albanians, provides critical remarks about the statements of Albanian officials, and thus implicitly blames them for the lack of a swift deal about the deportation of Albanian migrants, and fails to provide an in-depth and overtly critical comment about the most drastic anti-Albanian statements by the British officials.

Two out of three newspapers selected in this study tend to frame and present Albanians in a negative and stigmatising way. This is a common and simplistic trope that most conservative media revert to. While the UK has their own Albanian community that is well integrated into society, the conservative media tends to overlook it and to report on individual or isolated cases of Albanian immigrants where they are the criminals, the abusers of social welfare and laws, and invaders of the British coast. According to Van Dijk, this kind of representation is rather typical when negatively framing minorities in the media. As he argues, the way news media portrays minorities is often biased and unfair, showing preference to the dominant group and presenting minority communities in a negative light.⁷³ In such representation,

*even potentially neutral topics, such as immigration, housing, employment or cultural immigration, soon tend to have a negative dimension: immigration may be topicalized as a threat, and most ethnic relations represented in terms of problems and deviance if not as a threat as well, most typically so in news about crime, drugs and violence minorities are associated with.*⁷⁴

In the examined media, the Albanians were often framed firstly as immigrants rather than a well-established, contributing ethnicity in the UK, but as linked to immigration issues, problematic, prone to crime, violence and abusing social welfare. Thus, arguably, it is the conservative (and) media discourse on Albanian immigration, perhaps more than about the black or LGBT community, that perhaps exposes the true face of the recent British establishment and political sentiments at large.

⁷³ Van Dijk, Teun. 2000. New (s) Racism: A Discourse. *Ethnic minorities and the media* 37, 33-49.

⁷⁴ Holliday, Adrian / Hyde, Martin and John Kullman. 2004. *Intercultural communication: An advanced resource book*. London: Routledge, 198.

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