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## ***Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?***

By Gëzim Alpion

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### **Reviewed by Dr Glyn Davies**

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In this account of the life of Mother Teresa, Gëzim Alpion determinedly declares that he has sought to avoid the partisan in his considerations of her life and works. While the author conscientiously identifies any bias perceived in his various sources, his work does position the life of Mother Teresa as best understood when her Albanian heritage is properly acknowledged and understood as being central to her identity. The book seems to be more an analysis and critique of the literary controversy that surrounds Mother Teresa than an examination

of the cult of celebrity. However, as a review of such literature it offers a useful and worthwhile analysis, as long as the reader remembers to consider the positionality of the author.

I found Chapters 3 and 4 to be the most interesting and compelling. The account of Mother Teresa's life while a young woman in Skopje and the discussion of why she might have avoided identification as 'Albanian' are useful contributions to any understanding of Mother Teresa. However the book eventually seems unable to escape the need to explain the 'Albanianness' of a woman who seemingly rejected every aspect of the Albanian patriarchy for a religious culture. Mother Teresa apparently embraced the teaching of the Apostle Paul that in the Church there is no longer Jew nor Greek. Therefore, although Mother Teresa could let go of being Albanian, Albanians and others have been unable to let go of her. That her new culture effectively meant her nationality no longer defined her identity seems to be more than many commentators can bear; thus the issue of identity rather than of celebrity haunts this book, as the author repeatedly collapses Mother Teresa into 'Albanianness'.

However the book does offer the migrationist a very useful account of an exceptional migration trajectory and, although this is not a declared objective of the book, it is also worth reading for its migratory sub-text. Mother Teresa as a migrant woman in the early part of the twentieth century makes for fascinating speculation regarding her motives and the modality of her mobility.

I enjoyed this book and anyone interested in how Albanian identity is understood and constructed should take the time to read it carefully.