

SOCIALISM

IN ACTION:

Albania's Ideological and Cultural Revolution and the Lessons from History

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Abstract

Based mainly on Albanian primary sources, this article is a comparative analysis of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution in communist Albania in the mid 1960s. The article emphasizes the importance that the regime placed on the historical tradition of mass mobilizations accumulated in other communist countries before, primarily Mao's Cultural Revolution in China in the mid 1960s, and the Cultural Revolution in the Soviet Union during the 1930s. The article argues that the Cultural Revolution in communist Albania created new forms of legitimacy and strengthened the continuation of the policies that the communists had implemented since their coming to power. This differed from similar movements in the Soviet Union where the Cultural Revolution had a foundational aim, and also from the Chinese Cultural Revolution which resulted in a chaotic and disruptive

movement. The article also argues that the regime had to resort to the revival of local traditions – carefully selected – and the people’s cultural production to forge forms of legitimacy that would allow the regime to mobilize a large part of the population around the Party’s political line. The carefully controlled mass movement targeted the country’s religions, transforming Albanian into the first official atheist state in Europe, the emancipation of women, and the increase of economic outputs through mass actions of volunteering work in specific economic projects. The movement nonetheless created spaces for personal affirmation, new cultural expressions, and often agency for the people involved. Finally, the article argues that the Cultural Revolution in Albania rather than emulating the Chinese and the Soviet experiences, responded to the ruling party’s necessity to further its political and economic aims, while also strengthening and deepening the control of the party over the society.

Keywords: *Albania, Ideological and Cultural Revolution, Soviet Union, China, socialist construction*

I. Introduction

The dyad of culture and revolution has long been a fixture of political transformations, since the Bolshevik Revolution in the Soviet Union.¹ In Albania, as in the rest of the socialist camp, the attempt to transform a predominantly rural society into a modern and industrialized socialist one also implied the

¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.

transformation of man, his remaking – and the remaking of society as a whole. In the decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the socialist system in Albania reached the zenith of its transformation, during which ideology, economy, and society were radicalized in the Party's efforts to bring revolution to a mature stage. Mass mobilization became an effective tool that communist leaders often used to forge a new man with a new mindset, while also using mass campaigns to bring about the “changes in the social base that determine” the transformation of the population's mindset, their way of thinking.²

In this sense, the historical experience of the “cultural revolution” in the Soviet Union during the Soviet First Five Year Plan (FYP) 1928-1932, and the more recent Chinese Cultural Revolution launched in 1966, was not lost on Albanian leaders, who had at their disposal a long tradition of mass mobilization from these countries that targeted the remaking of the Party, the individual, and the society.³ The Soviet experience also became

² Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 3.

³ For the Soviet cultural revolution, see: Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978. Hundreds of publications exist on the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Among many, see: Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006; Jicai Feng, *Ten Years of Madness: Oral Histories of China's Cultural Revolution*, San Francisco: China Books, 1996; Barbara Barnouin and Changgen Yu, *Ten Years of Turbulence: The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, London and New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1993; Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008; Joel Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009; Yiching Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese*

the founding experiment of the leader's personality cult.⁴ This experience was also significantly influenced by China's leader Mao Zedong who, using his Red Book, became the centre around which hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens mobilized in intra-Party struggles, and which millions more in the world beyond China cherished.⁵

Yet, the Albanian experience was different in scope and scale, because all mass movements must deal with local conditions resulting from distinct historical trajectories and enshrined deep-rooted traditions. After two decades of communist rule, the Albanian leaders decided to launch a mass campaign involving all of society to shield the Party's line from

Socialism in Crisis, London: Harvard University Press, 2014; Dongping Han, *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Educational Reforms and Their Impact on China's Rural Development*, New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. More recently, see: Tania Branigan, *Red Memory: Living, Remembering, and Forgetting China's Cultural Revolution*, London: Guardian Faber Publishing, 2023. See also the excellent contribution by sociologist Guobin Yang, "China's Zhiqing Generation: Nostalgia, Identity, and Cultural Resistance in the 1990s", *Modern China* vol. 23, no. 3 (2003): pp. 267-296. A different light on the Cultural Revolution in China has been shed recently by Alessandro Russo, who outlines the egalitarian drive of Mao's campaign, and Mao's fear that the mass campaign might be defeated, resulting in the restoration of capitalism. See: Alessandro Russo, *Cultural Revolution and Revolutionary Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. The French philosopher Alain Badiou wonders if the Chinese Cultural Revolution was the last revolution during the twentieth century; see: Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, London and New York: Verso, 2010, pp. 101-167. Both Badiou and Russo see the Chinese Cultural Revolution as an important political movement among many in the twentieth century that sought egalitarianism and fought against war. They also conclude that the revolution failed, eventually succumbing to the power of global capitalism.

⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia*.

⁵ Alexander C. Cook, ed., *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

revisionism while also strengthening economic policies, and in the process highlighting certain local cultural traits and promoting local folklore in art and music. To promote this revolution, the regime scaled up the use of mass propaganda, not just as an alternative regime of facts but also as a stigmatizing tool used to reject parts of the past and promote the bright future ahead. Additionally, the regime mobilized the power of stories: revising history and narrating new public versions of the past for political ends. Above all, it was the role of the leader Enver Hoxha to centralize the Party's power, and to establish solid foundations for long-term development that would shape the generation of people born after the end of the Second World War.

In exploring the Albanian Ideological and Cultural Revolution, this article emphasizes the importance that the regime placed on the historical tradition of mass mobilizations accumulated in other communist countries before, primarily China and the Soviet Union. The article also argues that the regime had to resort to the revival of local traditions – carefully selected – and the people's cultural production to forge forms of legitimacy that would allow the regime to mobilize a large part of the population around the Party's political line. The movement nonetheless created spaces for personal affirmation, new cultural expressions, and often agency for the people involved. Finally, this article argues that culture, ideology, elements of national folklore, and nationalism, were ultimately all means for claiming new spaces for the Party in people's everyday life, strengthening its presence in society and its control over the private spheres that had escaped the regime's control up until that point.

II. The Reasons for the Revolution and its Beginning

The first signs of a new push for revolutionary measures came at the beginning of 1966. The Central Committee of the Party of Labour of Albania (Partia e Punës e Shqipërisë, hereafter PPSH) decided to address a letter to the people, preparing them for revolutionary measures necessary for the further development of socialism. Preparations and discussions at the party level for such a move had been taking place since 1965. Proclaiming that the country had entered “a new era... that of the complete building of the socialist society”, the letter mainly warned against manifestations of foreign influence and fuelled more mass mobilization to achieve political and economic objectives. The letter also emphasized the right of the masses to criticize party officials, which went in line with accountability sessions in both the Soviet Union and China. The letter also pushed for a struggle against bureaucratism, and praised what it called “the revolutionary initiative to go and work in production”.⁶ The latter

⁶ On the preparation of the public letter addressed to the Party, army, and the people, regarding the importance and the understanding of some revolutionary measures that the Party has undertaken, in Records of the Politburo, 9 February 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.9, f. 1-16; Tirana, 4 March 1966. Letter of the Central Committee addressed to communists, workers, and soldiers, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.9, f. 34-62; Tirana, 4 March 1966. Minutes of the party plenum meeting, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.9, f. 128-213. See also documents of the politburo, March 1966, in Arkivi Qëndror i Shtetit (Central State Archive, hereafter AQSH), (Fondi/Folder) F.14, AP-OU, (Viti/Year) V.1966, (Dosje/Dossier) D.10. The main historical documents cited in this article regarding Albania and its communist period are at the Central State Archive, in Tirana, Party's Archive/Arkivi i Partisë (hereinafter AP), Leading Organs/Organet Udhëheqëse (hereinafter OU), and the Ministry of Education.

initiative resembled the famous Chinese campaign *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside*, in particular the mobilization of millions of young students from urban areas who were sent for many years in remote rural villages during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.⁷ The letter marked the official start of the campaign against bureaucratism, and the revolutionary measures outlined in the letter – including the initiative to send the cadres to work in production – were explicitly framed within the logic of this campaign. The objective was to raise the educational level of the rural population while helping the local people in their economic production.

Although the topic of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution was publicized on the radio, in newspapers, posters, banners, and all other forms of mass communication at least since March of 1966, it became central for the first time in Enver Hoxha's report to the Fifth Congress of the PPSH in early November 1966.⁸ In his 323-page long speech, a proper chapter was dedicated to the Cultural Revolution – under the title of “Deepening Further the Ideological and Cultural Revolution” – which occupied no less than 43 pages.⁹ Then, on 7 February

⁷ Chen Yi, Ziyang Fan, Xiaomin Gu, and Li-An Zhou, “Arrival of Young Talent: The Send-Down Movement and Rural Education in China”, *American Economic Review* vol. 110, no. 11, (2020), pp. 3393-3430. The authors estimate that in China 16 million young students were sent to rural areas to help with local tasks. They assess the impact on rural education that this movement had.

⁸ “Mësuesi – përçues i politikës së partisë në fshat, misionar i kulturës së re socialiste”, *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People's Voice*], 8 May 1966.

⁹ Report of Enver Hoxha at the Fifth Party Congress, 1 November 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.1/18, (fletë/page) f. 213-256. See also, Politburo records, 10 and 11 October 1966. Report on the work of the Central

1967, *The People's Voice* (*Zëri i Popullit*), the Party's mouthpiece, published a speech on its front page that Hoxha addressed to the entire nation. In this speech, titled "Further Revolutionization of the Party and Power",¹⁰ the use of the word "further" was not accidental. It denoted, first of all, that the Ideological and Cultural Revolution would be a continuation on the path of building socialism in the country – which had started in 1944 when the communists came to power – not a rupture with the post-liberation social and political order. Secondly, it signalled that the Ideological and Cultural Revolution was going to be a "furthering" of all the steps undertaken in the very recent past; it was a continuation, more fervent perhaps, of the measures adopted (and adapted) from both the Soviet Union under Stalin and from China during recent years. Here, the differences in aims between Albania's and China's Cultural Revolutions are clear: Mao wanted a fresh start for the country and the party, while Albania wanted to solidify and tighten the party's grip on the country and society. Moreover, Hoxha's speech called on the most representative strata of the country – students, soldiers,

Committee that will be held at the Fifth Party Congress, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 126-151.

¹⁰ "Mbledhje e përbashkët e organizatave-bazë të Partisë të Minierës së Qymyrgurit të Krrabës, Uzinës 'Enver', Kooperativës Bujqësore 'Vilhelm Pik', Repartit Usharak nr.5009, dhe Universitetit Shtetëror të Tiranës. Shoku Enver Hoxha, Sekretar i Parë i Komitetit Qendror të PPSH, trajtoi temën: 'Revolucionarizimi i mëtejshëm i partisë dhe i pushtetit'" ["Joint Meeting of the Party's base-organizations of the Coal Mines of Krraba, of the 'Enver' Plant, of the 'Vilhelm Pik' Agricultural Cooperative, of the Military Garrison nr.5009, and the State University of Tirana. Comrade Enver Hoxha, First Secretary Of The PLA Central Committee, examined the issue: 'The Further Revolutionization of the Party and Power'"], *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People's Voice*], 7 February 1967.

peasants, workers, and intellectuals – to enact this transformation. This differed from China, where the Cultural Revolution had been promoted mainly by young students, at least in its early stages. On the other hand, the similarity with Stalin's cultural revolution in this aspect is obvious: specialists, and not students, enforced the Soviet cultural revolution in the 1930s. Significantly, Tirana had little interest in using a mass campaign to create a *tabula rasa* in the country when there was no need to do so.

Twenty years after the establishment of the communist regime, the PPSH had achieved the main objectives of establishing and consolidating its power. In international relations, Albania's shifting alliances in the early Cold War had little impact on the Party's central role in society and the leadership's hold on power.¹¹ Despite the split with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, the alliance with China was, in the meantime, stable, and the Chinese government approved most of Albania's economic requests, in particular those concerning the building of many industrial projects across the country. The mid-1960s are also the years during which, for many people in Albania, the building of socialism started to become tangible: schools reached every corner of the country and young students from poor backgrounds began enrolling at universities more often; health care became universal and accessible to most people despite many shortages; new towns built around economic (industrial) projects created urban spaces; and more consumer goods than before were available, although shortages of all sorts

¹¹ Ylber Marku "Shifting Alliances: Albania in the Early Cold War", *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 24, no. 3, Fall 2022, pp. 80-115.

continued and the period of relative wealth would be short-lived.

Thus, the Albanian leaders launched a “further revolutionization” campaign for reasons different than those behind the cultural revolutions in China and the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Union, the First Five-year Plan (1928-1932) became an opportunity to establish the foundations of socialism and build a new civilization with all that it entails – art, culture, industry, living spaces, different social relations, a new political awareness, and eventually a new shape for the political subject. It was intended as a departure from everything against which the Bolsheviks had fought in the Russian Empire. The Chinese Cultural Revolution, on the other hand, was less of a foundational moment than a salvational one. Mao felt his rule was threatened and he believed that Soviet-style revisionism might take over the Party’s control, and possibly also that capitalism might recover its status in China. Hence his mobilization of predominantly young students – turned into Red Guards – against the same political party he had founded. With Mao’s call to “bombard the headquarters”, the Chinese Cultural Revolution turned into a campaign of purification, a reinforcement of Mao’s line and the original aims of the Party, that of building socialism the way Mao understood it.¹²

Enver Hoxha, on the other hand, had little against which to position himself. The purges of the pro-Soviet revisionists in the early 1960s had ensured that his political line and his

¹² Yang Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Turbulent Decade: A History of the Cultural Revolution*, trans. D. W. Y. Kwok, Honolulu: Hawai’i University Press, 1990, pp. 93-100.

authority would continue to prevail.¹³ Therefore, the “further” in the Party’s announcements denotes its attempt to project internal cohesiveness and stability in its political line and policies, precisely because the Party and its policies had always been susceptible to external developments beyond its own control. The PPSH was acutely aware of external pressure even if it had always tried to take a proactive role in these developments by capitalizing on them. Such is the case, for instance, in the adoption of socialist realism, which became official after the break with Yugoslavia in 1948, and was mentioned for the first time by Enver Hoxha at the First Congress of the Communist Party of Albania in 1948. The event marked the first time that a high-profile politician had used the term “socialist realism” in relation to the “new” Albanian art and literature.¹⁴ Hoxha incorporated the term socialist realism in his speech in 1948 as if Soviet-style socialist realism had already been adopted years before in Albania when in fact it had not been; he also used the term as if people had been talking about Albanian socialist realist art for years, when that had not been the case.

Nonetheless, the mid-1960s in Albania represented a time in which the establishment of some sort of new legitimacy was required, one that could move forward and strengthen twenty

¹³ Ana Lalaj, *Pranvera e rrejshme e '56-s* [The Deceptive Spring of 1956], Tirana: Infbotues, 2015; Elidor Mëhilli, “Defying De-Stalinization: Albania’s 1956”, *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 13, no. 4, Fall 2011, pp. 4-56.

¹⁴ “‘Letërsia jonë duhet të ndjekë rrugën e realizmit socialist’: Diskutime në takimin e Byrosë Politike të KQ të PPSH” [“‘Our Literature Should Follow the Road of Socialist Realism’: Discussion at the meeting of the Political Bureau of the CC of the PLA”], in Enver Hoxha, *Vepra të zgjedhura, Vëll. 2: nëntor 1948 – nëntor 1965*, Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese “8 Nëntori”, 1975, p. 179. The discussion here mentions earlier events and meetings.

years of rule. The influence of the Soviet Union continued even after the split with Moscow because most of the country's intelligentsia had been educated in Soviet and East European schools. The alliance with Beijing instead, had caused many in Albania to question the possibility of China matching the Soviet material abundance and supplying part of it to Albania.¹⁵ Just as following the Soviets after Khrushchev's attack on Stalin and promotion of reform became a liability for the political line of the Albanian ruling party which refused de-Stalinization, so too a blind following of Chinese-style socialism in Albania was considered problematic given the many differences between the two countries.¹⁶ Several reports reached the leadership informing them of the people's discontent with importing Chinese ways into everyday life.¹⁷ They were not alone. Hoxha himself, for reasons other than those of the people who disliked imitating

¹⁵ Ylber Marku, "Preparing for an Alliance: China's Socialist Model and Albania's Economic Design in the Early Cold War", *European Review of History* vol. 30, no. 3, July 2023, doi:10.1080/13507486.2023.2188581.

¹⁶ On the Soviet policies under the rule of Nikita Khrushchev see, among many: Melanie Ilić and Jeremy Smith, eds., *Khrushchev in the Kremlin: Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964*, New York: Routledge, 2011; William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, New York: Norton, 2003; William J. Tompson, *Khrushchev: A Political Life*, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1995; Donald A. Filtzer, *The Khrushchev Era: De-Stalinization and the Limits of Reform in the USSR, 1953-1964*, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1993; Aleksandr Stykalin, "The Hungarian Crisis of 1956: The Soviet Role in the Light of New Archival Documents", *Cold War History* vol. 2, no. 1, October 2001, pp. 113-144; and Csaba Békés, "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics", CWIHP Working Paper no. 16, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, 1996.

¹⁷ A document was discussed in the Politburo in early February 1966 regarding a letter from a military official who anonymously had attacked the Albanian regime for "following the Chinese". See AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.9, f. 27-30.

China, in a meeting of the Politburo in October 1966, just days before the PPSH's Fifth Congress, questioned the Chinese Cultural Revolution and attacked the "anti-Marxist cult of Mao Zedong".¹⁸ He saw the events in China as resulting from the many mistakes of the Chinese Communist Party, mainly a lack of proper analysis and understanding, and an insufficient attack on Soviet revisionism. Furthermore, the Albanians had disagreements with China regarding the figure of Stalin: for Hoxha, Stalin had made no mistakes, while for Chinese leaders Stalin was fallible. More importantly, differences with China also emerged on the concept of the class struggle, given the Chinese suggestion that at the early stages of socialism, the communists should cooperate with the old bourgeois class, while the Albanians (Hysni Kapo and Mehmet Shehu), prided themselves on the fact that in Albania such classes had simply been eliminated.¹⁹

There was, moreover, a common pattern between the Soviets and the Chinese from the Albanian perspective: in both cases internal party disputes, the formation of factions, and the emergence of discontinuity in the wake of leadership changes, had weakened the Party and its hold on political power. In the case of China, the chaotic events of the early years of the Cultural Revolution were an alarm bell for the Albanians that revisionism and chaos might prevail in Beijing, with all the uncertainty that disorder might bring upon the Sino-Albanian alliance and its

¹⁸ Ylber Marku, "China and Albania: The Cultural Revolution and Cold War Relations", *Cold War History* vol. 17, no. 4, 2017, pp. 367-383.

¹⁹ Politburo records, 10 and 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 376-408; For an analysis of the reception of the Chinese Cultural Revolution by the Albanian leaders see Marku, "China and Albania".

implications for the economic survival of the regime in Tirana. Albanian leaders wanted to make a notable departure and establish some distance from foreign influences over their regime, be it in the form of the Soviet legacy or Chinese influence. Thus, the enthusiasm of the mid-1960s represented an opportunity to give a ‘great leap forward’ to the Party’s role in society and at the same time attempt to give the socialist regime in Albania a façade that would seem as authentic as possible, one that was neither Soviet nor Chinese – although still deeply Stalinist. Also, the Ideological and Cultural Revolution was the moment in which the Albanian leadership sought to deepen the state’s totalitarian character. In the context of the constant mobilization of the masses, the term totalitarianism should be understood in two ways: the total control of the Party over the masses in all spheres of human activity, and the total participation of the society as a whole in well-organized campaigns.

In this context, in March 1966, in Albania, ranks were promptly removed from the army and political commissars were reintroduced.²⁰ In rural areas, collectivization started everywhere – including those areas economists knew to be unproductive.²¹ Moreover, in addition to calls “against bureaucratism in the state apparatus”, others pushed for a “revolutionary working style”. The aim was “the unrooting of any basis for the emergence of revisionism and the restoration of capitalism”, as had happened

²⁰ Tirana, 7 March 1966. Decree of the People’s Presidium to remove ranks in the army, in AQU [Arkivi Qendror i Ushtrisë/Central Military Archive, hereafter AQU], V.1966, D.3, f. 4-9.

²¹ AQSH, Ministry of Education, F.511, V.1966, D.66.

in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.²² Following the example of the Soviet Union's cultural revolution, the Albanians decided to abolish several government ministries: the Ministry of Justice was one of them and, shortly afterward, the entire justice sector came under fire in Hoxha's speech to the Fifth Party Congress.²³ In response, prosecutors and judges set about organizing as many public trials as possible outside of the courts and featuring the active participation of the masses. This is an important example of the participation of the masses in state affairs beyond the usual economically or educationally motivated initiatives.²⁴ In Albania, these revolutionary measures were thus a struggle "for the triumph of the socialist ideology", which the authorities considered a long and difficult battle.²⁵

Now, this battle should be properly contextualized. When the Cultural Revolution broke out in China in the summer of 1966 accompanied by violent scenes, from the Albanian leaders' perspective it could have easily been viewed as a new manifestation of the self-destructive forces inside the socialist camp that had caused so much trouble ten years earlier, in the wake of the de-Stalinization process promoted by Khrushchev.²⁶

²² Politburo records, 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 83.

²³ Tirana, Politburo records 10 and 11 October 1966. Report on the work of the Central Committee that will be held at the Fifth Party Congress, in AQSH, F.14, OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 122. For Hoxha's speech at the Fifth Party Congress where he criticized the justice system see AQSH, F.14, OU, V.1966, D.1/18, f. 205-206.

²⁴ Politburo records, 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 83.

²⁵ Ibid., f. 126-151.

²⁶ Ilic and Smith, eds., *Khrushchev in the Kremlin*; Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*; Tompson, *Khrushchev: A Political Life*; Filtzer, *The*

Those years of turmoil had brought instability across Eastern Europe, the crippling of the power of the communist leaders in Hungary, as well as threats of similar transformations in Poland. But those events also brought awareness among Albanian leaders that the Party should persist in cracking down on any form of individual autonomy that might lead to political dissent. Moreover, following the death of Stalin, the Albanians maintained that Moscow had abandoned the class struggle altogether, and more recently the Albanians thought that the Chinese were not practicing the class struggle rigorously and sufficiently enough, fearing that China may succumb to revisionism and abandon it altogether just as the Soviets were accused of doing after Stalin's death. Hence, the class struggle maintained a central place in the Albanian regime's narrative in promoting its own Ideological and Cultural Revolution.

In Hoxha's speech to the Fifth Party Congress in November 1966, the revolution and the class struggle were "a struggle for the hearts and the minds of the people".²⁷ However, Hoxha explicitly refers to the Ideological and Cultural Revolution as a *continuation* of the class struggle but *on the ideological front* and – crucially – *amid the people*. In other words, the primary target of the class struggle would no longer

Khrushchev Era: De-Stalinization and the Limits of Reform in the USSR, 1953-1964. For the speech against Stalin see: Nikita S. Khrushchev, *Report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the 20th Party Congress, February 14, 1956*, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956, pp. 30-47; and Johanna Granville, "Reactions to the Events of 1956: New Findings from the Budapest and Warsaw Archives", *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 38, no. 2, 2003, pp. 261-290.

²⁷ Politburo records, 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 129.

be the *actual class enemy* but the remnants of bourgeois ideology *in the minds and consciousness of communists* themselves. This was Hoxha's answer to the disagreements with the Chinese during the Albanian premier's visit to China in April 1966: the continuation, the object, and the terrain of the development of the class struggle in Albania.²⁸ The PPSH was unwilling to admit that there still existed antagonistic classes in Albania – so its leaders turned the class struggle against the *remnants* of the antagonistic classes and shifted it to the *ideological* (and cultural) domain. Similarly, Hoxha was unwilling to bring the class struggle inside the PPSH, as Mao had ostensibly done with the Chinese Communist Party, so he took the class struggle to the masses being led by the Party instead. But it was the choice of the ideological and cultural realm that allowed him to do that. This effectively meant that the fate of communism in Albania would depend on the production of a new socialist human being, a thoroughly Stalinist position that can't have been lost on Hoxha. The timing was important. A generation of young people that were born after the Second World War were preparing to serve in the economy and society. Many thousands were finishing university and ready to be appointed to economic, administrative, and political posts across the country. They needed to be remoulded and readied to serve the revolution and the Party with a new spirit.

Political considerations were only part of the impetus behind the Ideological and Cultural Revolution in Albania. Other factors concerned the manpower needed in the construction projects, for which thousands of people passed from

²⁸ Marku, “China and Albania”.

administrative duties to production units. The drive for industrialization had advanced to a stage at which, with Chinese assistance, hundreds of infrastructural and industrial projects were being built across the country. First the Soviets and later the Chinese had both questioned the feasibility of Hoxha's economic plans for major industrial projects that required specialized manpower and a large workforce that Albania lacked. So this revolution was also a movement aimed at achieving economic objectives that required manpower in a country where many tasks were still carried out with bare hands in what used to be called *aksione* (mass actions). It is thus possible to say that this revolution was also making up – in the cases of specific projects – for the lack of technology and adequate equipment in Albania.

Motivating the masses and involving them in mass actions helped build several of these projects, such as railways, construction sites for industries, dams, and roads, highlighting the figure of the worker and the spirit of sacrifice in the process.²⁹ The move was important politically because it was aimed at one of the elements that the Albanians considered to have caused the emergence of revisionism in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev. The issue goes back to the establishment of the Bolshevik Revolution. Roy Medvedev writes that Lenin, during his last days, wrote several short articles encouraging the struggle against bureaucratism.³⁰ Social differentiation had been an issue since early in the Soviet revolution, which Stalin had attempted

²⁹ Politburo records, 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 84.

³⁰ Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism*, trans. George Shriver, revised and expanded edition, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, pp. 99-100.

to tackle by attacking the privileges of the intelligentsia from the 1930s.³¹ Attacking this class of people allowed room for social mobility for the working class people, who were then promoted to jobs outside the factories, such as management and administration. Thus, reinforcing the class war, in the Soviet Union bureaucrats and professionals in all fields were considered a burden to be removed, and certain positions were abolished altogether. Similarly, in Albania under the campaign against bureaucratism, aimed at bringing everyone closer to the working class, thousands of teachers, bureaucrats, state employees of all levels, artists, writers, and professionals in general, were sent in organized campaigns to help production in factories and farms for short periods. In a more lasting and substantial change, however, hundreds of workers were also recruited to higher education, or in office jobs in administration or technical duties.

Also, the collectivization of agriculture was implemented throughout the rural population. Even before the communists took power, Albania had a limited number of landowners and their properties had already been distributed to peasants during the late 1940s. Yet, the Party proposed and enforced collectivization as a way to level the differences between those deemed kulaks and the peasants, in this way legitimizing the class struggle fought on ideological grounds. Finally, the Party strengthened its institutions for political and literary debates, permeating them with an enhanced ideological spirit that emphasized – in an almost messianic way – the importance of unity around the Party, and restricting the spaces possible for independent discussions.

³¹ Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Revolution in Russia*, p. 38.

The Party also made political education mandatory for all of the country's technocratic class, professionals in all fields with a certain degree of independence of mind. This decision may be related, among others, to contemporary events in China. Concerning reports were reaching Tirana that portrayed the Chinese Communist Party in chaos, leading Hoxha to conclude that "there [in China] the party organization is in paralysis, [it] is not even the one leading the Cultural Revolution".³² Even when the situation in China became clearer, and Mao was seen as having promoted this mass campaign to rescue China from the threat of revisionism, the Albanians considered China to have done it "through ways and with means unseen before".³³ Thus Albania's Ideological and Cultural Revolution was also a *reaction* to the Chinese Cultural Revolution – not an extension of it so much as a differentiation from it. On this point, it should be noted that at the beginning of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, seeing the confusion and the violence against the Party in China from the Red Guards, the Albanian leaders seriously considered the possibility that Mao's line would be defeated and the country would shift towards revisionism. It is possible that in the eight months separating the open letter of the Albanian Party's Central Committee in early March 1966 and Hoxha's speech at the Fifth Party Congress in November 1966, and the three months separating the Party's Congress from Hoxha's February 1967 speech (during which time the PPSH in Albania was becoming

³² Tirana, 10 October 1966. Transcript of the Politburo meeting, "Remarks of Enver Hoxha on the Chinese Cultural Revolution", in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 376-408; Marku, "China and Albania".

³³ On the further development of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (Enver Hoxha, June 1967), in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1967, D.1, f. 192 & f. 211.

more and more informed about the Chinese Cultural Revolution), Hoxha decided to expand the revolutionary measures that had already been taken in the context of the campaign against bureaucratism by introducing new campaigns infused with the spirit of the mass line that seemed to animate the Chinese Cultural Revolution – but adapted to the Albanian conditions. Thereby, Hoxha reached a sort of compromise between domestic and foreign politics as well as ideological considerations. Thus, politically the Ideological and Cultural Revolution in Albania further reinforced the role of the Party and its leader Enver Hoxha, in order to have strong control over the country's line in the event that China failed to maintain the shared ideological course with Albania that had made the alliance possible in the first place. Yet, this seems to be more a result of the revolution, rather than a deliberate policy from the beginning. Eventually, however, the Albanian leaders considered the Chinese Cultural Revolution “a great political revolution”, and learning from the mistakes of China where revisionism was rooted, they “took steps that prevent the emergence of revisionism”.³⁴ Hence, the Albanian revolution was first and foremost a massive political campaign to achieve political aims, in a way that would make the masses participants – so as to show that in the end “the dictatorship of the proletariat, is indeed the power of the masses”.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid., f. 192 & f. 213.

³⁵ Ibid., f. 192 & f. 217.

III. Revolution in Life – Art and Creativity

At the outset of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Hoxha was careful to cite Lenin – that proletarian culture is possible only if built on the cultural production of earlier stages including capitalism – and to attack the concept of the *tabula rasa* in China.³⁶ By contrast, in Albania, he claimed, the Cultural Revolution intended to build upon the past, by critically analysing it, as a way to understand and highlight the socialist present. Without the past, for the Albanians, the communist man would be nothing but “an empty man”.³⁷ Yet, the Albanian leadership also criticized intellectuals for their detachment from the masses and their general underestimation of the physical work done by peasants and workers. Hence “the people of science, art, and culture, should be humble students of the great, infallible teacher – the people”.³⁸ In reality, he meant that people of arts and science should be subject to the Party, and “literature and the arts should become a gun in the hands of the Party to educate the workers in the spirit of socialism”.³⁹ In this period, particular emphasis was placed on the eradication of what were called foreign manifestations (*shfaqje të huaja*) in art and literature. In a report of the Politburo in October 1966 some

³⁶ Politburo records, 10 and 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 394-396.

³⁷ Politburo records, 10 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 396.

³⁸ Politburo records, 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 134-135.

³⁹ Ibid., f. 138-139; See also Report of Enver Hoxha at the Fifth Party Congress, 1 November 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f.1/18, f. 234.

theatres and the opera house were accused of performing foreign plays and works of the past, in literature “suspicious foreign writers are translated, and in the cinema, dangerous movies are shown”.⁴⁰ The report called for the creation of the revolutionary art and literature of socialist realism.

Although this centralized direction of cultural and literary work restricted the framework within which intellectual discussion took place, it is precisely the late 1960s and early 1970s that saw relatively open debates in Albania – most notably in *Drita* – over whether literature should follow (Soviet) socialist realism or move in a different direction after the break with the Soviets. The relative atmosphere of debate is evident in the fact that during these years there were talks at the High Institute of Arts about Expressionism, Van Gogh, and other modernist authors and topics – all supposedly to criticize and dismiss them, but that does not elide the fact that, in the visual arts at least, this was a period of expanded intellectual debate.

In literature, the common man, the miner, worker, soldier, and farmer, and the positive hero in general became central to narratives, together with patriots and historical figures, and writers often amplified political rhetoric, driven by the priorities of socialist realism.⁴¹ Figures such as the electrician who brings

⁴⁰ Politburo records, 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 141.

⁴¹ Raino Isto argues that Albania’s shifting alliances caused an attempt to create original art that would be less influenced by the Soviet Union (where many of those artists were educated) while attempting to connect to other realities such as China and the Far East in general. See: Raino Isto, “Between Two Easts: Picturing Global Socialism in Albanian Post-War Art, 1959-69”, *Art History* vol. 45, no. 5, November 2022, pp. 1058-1077, doi: 10.1111/1467-8365.12686.

electrical light to remote villages, allegorically also symbolizing the light and brightness of the Party; the miner that makes possible the extraction of minerals important for socialist economic modernity; the railway worker; the tractor-driver; and other professional figures central to the economic progress under socialism became the main protagonists in the visual arts. Their prominence also testified to the relatively late arrival of modernity in Albania compared to other European socialist countries. Electrification, together with industrialization, were two processes that in Albania occurred during the 1960s and most of the 1970s – four decades later than in the Soviet Union. The projection of socialist modernity in Albania was originally based on the Soviet Stalinist model and the historical experience of the 1930s, but it was actually realized in the era of Maoism. This means that Chinese Maoist elements informed and supplemented the earlier Soviet Stalinist model – which does not seem to have ever been fully abandoned.

In the visual arts, particularly in painting, a new narrative was established – that of an optimistic outlook on a bright future that was often highlighted by vivid and contrasting colours.⁴² Finding a way out of the hardships of the past was an ever-present motif in literary texts during these years, and pre-communist era literature that highlighted the poverty and misery of Albanians before socialism, and the drive for progress and national liberation, was ‘rediscovered’ and highlighted (as in the case of

⁴² In Albania many paintings of the period between early 1960s and late 1970s can be seen at the National Gallery of Art. For an interesting publication with illustrations of the painting in the Soviet Union during Stalin’s time, see Gleb Prokhorov, *Art Under Socialist Realism: Soviet Painting 1930-1950*, Roseville East, Australia: Craftsman House, 1995.

Migjeni's work). But literature, although one of the foremost arts under socialism in Albania, became disconnected from the rest of the European Soviet camp where exchanges among writers, including conferences that rehabilitated banned writers, took place instead.⁴³ Nonetheless, there was a conscious effort to intentionally expand the subjects and themes of the revolutionary transformation of socialist society, so that there were more artists who could deal with both everyday life and folklore and the partisan struggle. Therefore, in a way this isolation caused the formation of a local Albanian socialist realism. As Katerina Clark affirmed some time ago, just as there are many communisms, there are also many socialist realisms.⁴⁴

This socialist realism in Albania was locally distinct because although the forms of creativity resembled those of the Soviet Union during the 1930s and after, unlike the Soviet Union, they were nonetheless not opposed to tradition, but aimed at reshaping its narrative in the interest of forging strong

⁴³ Hans Günther, "How Socialist Realism was Exported to Eastern European Countries and How They Got Rid of It", in Evgeny Dobrenko and Natalia Jonsson-Skradol, eds., *Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures. Institutions, Dynamics, Discourses*, New York: Anthem Press, 2018, pp. 21-23. For a comprehensive study on the vast Soviet literature that exemplifies socialist realism, see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981; for an earlier study of socialist realism in literature in the Soviet Union, see C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins & Theory*, London and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1973.

⁴⁴ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*. "Socialist Realism", Clark affirms, "is essentially a name applied to Soviet culture's literary system rather than to a way of writing that is particularly 'socialist' or 'realist'" (p. 9). The theory of Socialist realism appeared for the first time in 1932 in the Soviet Union and became a theory during the period 1932-34.

nationalistic feelings.⁴⁵ Ancestral land and shared Albanian blood became preferred subjects in art and literature, just as important as the socialist values they claimed to treasure. This paradigm was common in other socialist countries, including the Soviet Union, under the aegis of creating art that was “socialist in form, national in content”.⁴⁶ In literature and cinema, the storylines were built around a hero, usually coming from the

⁴⁵ An interesting and original piece about socialist realism as an archive in Albania is Raino Isto's contribution, “Is Socialist Realism an Archive? Some theoretical notes on Aesthetics and Accumulation”, *Art Studies* no. 19, 2020, pp. 9-44. Boris Groys asserts that despite its claims as deriving from the masses and for the masses, socialist realism “because it was meant to educate, was unappealingly didactic, devoid of entertainment value and divorced from real life no less completely than Malevich's *Black Square*”. See: Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 8. For Groys, Stalinism (or socialist realism under Stalin) was a continuation of avant-garde modernism. The limit of this theory was underlined briefly by Petre M. Petrov, *Automatic for the Masses: The Death of the Author and the Birth of Socialist Realism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015, pp. 4-7. Similar connections, but also shifts, between avant-garde and socialist realism are discussed by Imre József Balázs, taking Hungary and Romania as case studies. See: Imre József Balázs “From Avant-Garde to Socialist Realism: Continuities and Discontinuities in Hungarian and Romanian Literature”, in Dobrenko and Jonsson-Skradol, eds., *Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures*, pp. 147-164. Vladislav Zubok argues that since the 1920s the Soviet Union organized a number of institutions to “peddle the socialist realist picture of the Soviet Union to Western leftist intellectuals... this ‘socialist realism for export’ was effective because it responded to the ideas and aspirations of the Western intellectuals... In a sense socialist realism was a bizarre spin-off of Western culture and art practices”. See: Vladislav Zubok, “The Demise of ‘Socialist Realism for Export’ in 1947: Voks Receives John Steinbeck and Robert Capa”, in Dobrenko and Jonsson-Skradol, eds., *Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures*, p. 71.

⁴⁶ Karolina Kluczevska and Niso Hojjeva “Socialist in Form, ‘National’ in Content? Art and Ideology in Soviet Tajikistan”, *Nationalities Papers* vol. 50 , no. 2, March 2022, pp. 372-394.

bottom strata of society, who struggles to overcome obstacles but always achieves what is righteous – often with the guiding hand of the Party and the wise lessons of the dear leader. In movies, two subjects became central: old obscure traditions and habits (*zakone prapanike*), which were ridiculed and condemned as outdated (see comedies such as *14 Vjeç dhëndërr* [*A Bridegroom at Fourteen*] or *Çifti i lumtur* [*The Happy Couple*]), and heroes from the Second World War, always with plots centred on the role of the Party and its leader in liberating the country from the fascist yoke (see, among others, *Lulëkuqet mbi mure* [*Red Poppies on Walls*] and *Ngadhënjim mbi vdekjen* [*Victory Over Death*]). In both cases, the underlying message was the achievement of national independence; society's redemption from the suffering of past political, social, and economic constraints, and the achievement of a happy and fulfilling life under socialism, pulling the individual away from old constraining habits and allowing human potential to be fully realized.

Movies centred around the figure of the partisan also conveyed an important message. They were a way of establishing difference from the Soviet Union: in many other East European socialist countries, the national liberation war was at least partly attributed to the contribution of the Red Army, whereas in Albania (and Yugoslavia) the partisans had been a grassroots popular force that contributed in the war against Nazism and fascism without the direct involvement of the Red Army. Thus, Albania could differentiate itself from other Soviet satellites by emphasizing the partisans as a true local antifascist heritage that

had succeeded in defeating the Nazis.⁴⁷ And in this sense, they advanced a position similar to the Yugoslavs, though of course, the two countries carried out their trajectories very differently.

A new genre that emerged during this period was the “revolutionary vigilance films”.⁴⁸ These were detective films set in primarily urban areas, usually featuring bureaucrats, rather than workers, in the key roles, with an exotic component of international espionage (and, in a few cases, scenes shot in the West!). These movies were hardly interested in either old habits or Second World War heroes. Instead, they were interested in the remnants of petit bourgeois culture (*mbeturina mikroborgjeze*), such as attachment to fashion, the propensity to drunkenness, or premarital sex. They epitomized the participation of the working masses in the Albanian surveillance system.⁴⁹ All foreign influences and manifestations (*shfaqje të huaja*) were prohibited and attacked, with a particular focus on Western influence, which was portrayed as deeply decadent, a reflection of the vices of the capitalist society.

The zeal of this anti-foreign narrative made a well-known victim in the Eleventh Festival of Song in December 1972, where

⁴⁷ Raino Isto, “Weak Monumentality”, *RACAR: Canadian Art Review* vol. 46, no. 2, 2021, pp. 34-50.

⁴⁸ Jonida Gashi, “Communist Noir: The Hunt for Hidden Traitors, Saboteurs, Spies, Revisionists, and Deviationists in Albania’s Revolutionary Vigilance Films of the 1970s and 1980s”, in Sarah Delahousse and Aleksander Sedzielarz eds., *Transnational Crime Cinema*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023, pp. 125-139; forthcoming also by Jonida Gashi, *Kinemaja para gjyqit: Nga kinokronikat dhe dokumentarët e gjyqeve të popullit të filmat e vigjilencës revolucionare të masave* [Cinema on Trial: From the Newsreels and Documentary films of the Communist Show Trials to the Revolutionary Vigilance Films], Tirana, 2024.

⁴⁹ Gashi, “Communist Noir”.

jazz and rock influences were visible (audible).⁵⁰ The leadership of the Party became directly involved in the purge of the artists and party officials in charge of cultural affairs, who had played a role in organizing the festival. Some were condemned to long years of imprisonment; others were luckier and ended up working on farms in remote villages across the country instead. The socialist regime in Albania, as Nicholas Tochka has argued in his study on music, embarked on a mission “to render all domains of creative life into discursive forms governable at the political centre”.⁵¹ The message was clear: socialist creativity should be free of foreign influences and draw from local traditions instead. The 1973 Party Plenum – where it was decided that, in light of the song contest in December 1972, a purge in the field of culture was necessary – may well be considered as the Party’s most successful effort to control the shifts and the zeal created during the Ideological and Cultural Revolution. The event was the culmination of the revolution, at least in the field of culture, but also the sign that the Party was rolling back some of the policies that had encouraged vivid debates that might have

⁵⁰ Albania had not been a unique case of Western musical influences during the Cold War, perhaps so only in the ruling party’s reaction to such influence. See: Yvetta Kajanova, Gertrud Pickhan, and Rudiger Ritter, eds., *Jazz from Socialist Realism to Postmodernism*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016, pp. 13-198. For the festival of 1972 see: Nicholas Tochka, *Audible States: Socialist Politics and Popular Music in Albania*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 90-94, and pp. 101-103.

⁵¹ Tochka, *Audible States*, p. 46. Tochka has also outlined the differences that the Ideological and Cultural Revolution brought to music production in Albania (pp. 72-78). One such impact was the thematic change, foregrounding, among others, songs with lyrics highlighting the material building of socialism, positive heroes, Second World War heroes, and patriotic songs.

resulted in foreign influences being absorbed into national culture - clearly conflicting with one of the aims of this revolution, that of purging such influences.

Ironically, the return to tradition in Albanian art and literature, which was aimed at highlighting, among other things, the values of the Albanian people, was in line with what was happening in the Soviet Union during the same time, in the 1960s and 1970s. There, as Groys has argued, “socialist realism began to yield to traditional realism... [with a] focus on the ‘eternal values’ embodied in the Russian people”.⁵² These values, many authors claimed – Groys mentions the name of Solzhenitsyn among others, who also rejected socialism – were well preserved under the Soviet model and kept away from the corruption caused by Western progress and individualism. Yet, in Albania in the arts and culture, vivid debates took place, in particular regarding literary creation, and music, but cultural production in these fields had to be for the masses.⁵³

IV. Women and Religion

Within the framework of mass mobilization for the further revolutionization of the country, two campaigns in particular affected large parts of the population. The first one attacked religion; the second one gave a ‘great leap forward’ to the emancipation of women.⁵⁴ The issue of religion was seriously discussed for the first time at a central level in a Party plenum at the end of April 1949 during which Hoxha warned against

⁵² Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 76.

⁵³ Tochka, *Audible States*, pp. 61-67.

⁵⁴ *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People's Voice*], 7 February 1967.

“fighting religion with party decrees”, acknowledging the contribution of the clergy in the national war of liberation against fascism.⁵⁵ At the same time, referring to Engels, the Party viewed the class struggle as the only vehicle “that can drag the proletariat into practicing social action to its end... which will ultimately liberate [the people] from religious oppression”.⁵⁶ The PPSH had sought to limit the power and influence of religion ever since it took power. But the campaign in 1967 brought about dramatic changes in the pace and scope of the struggle against religion, turning quantitative steps into qualitative transformations. The Party expanded and intensified its policy to the point of banning religion, declaring the country to be the first atheist state in the world, and mobilizing the masses to destroy the majority of places of worship. This transformed the nature of the Party’s outlook on religion, causing a rupture and making the policy a qualitatively *new* one rather than just a continuation of earlier policies.

For the Party, the work to dismantle religious belief needed to be meticulous because religion was structured around an organized community of clergy and had deep roots in people’s conscience – it was precisely “the opium of the people, which had poisoned them, and therefore the [Party’s] task was to cure them”.⁵⁷ In this struggle, the authorities made key

⁵⁵ Transcript of the second party plenum of the first party congress, 28-30 April 1949 in Tirana, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1949, D.1, f. 13-14.

⁵⁶ Transcript of the second Party Plenum of the first Party Congress, 28-30 April 1949 in Tirana, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1949, D.1, f. 14.

⁵⁷ Party of Labor of Albania, Central Committee, Tirana, 27 February 1967. To the District Party Committees, in AQSH, F.511, Ministria e Arsimit dhe e Kulturës [Ministry of Education and Culture], V.1967, D.20, f. 2.

differentiations. For them, “the clergy, except the Catholics, is very ignorant, and the practice of religion takes place through an archaic liturgy in Arabic that no one can understand”; this made it easier to defeat. “The Catholic clergy” however, was “richer” – highly educated and disciplined, and therefore more difficult to eradicate.⁵⁸ This aspect underlines how the regime, for the purpose of its struggle against religious practices, established a sort of hierarchy among the religions that required different approaches depending on the specific community.

Repressive measures against religion had been initiated upon the establishment of communist rule in Albania. The education of new generations of the clergy was made impossible because religious schools were closed, and education abroad was prohibited without official permission – which the regime never granted. Therefore, none of the clergy could go to Italy, traditionally the home of Catholic education, nor did the state allow any members of other religions to pursue their religious studies abroad. The cultural revolution movement tasked people with the struggle against the institutions where people went to pray, against churches and mosques, and the last generation of clergy still living at the time. Local party committees received instructions “to destroy churches, mosques, monasteries, [and] temples, the only places where clergy can meet the faithful people”.⁵⁹ The struggle against religion was to persist firmly “until [its] total disappearance”. Among its means, the Party used propaganda to mobilize nationalism as “a weapon in our hands against religion, because Islam has been the ideology of the

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Ottoman invaders, Christian Orthodox is the ideology of the Greek chauvinists, and the Catholic religion was the ideology of the Italian fascists”.⁶⁰ By associating these religions with these “enemies”, the masses were pushed towards rejecting their religious affiliations and practices. But the campaign against religion also became part of the overall class struggle: propaganda emphasized the clergy’s support for the property owners and their link to the exploitation of the masses. As a last measure, the Party also recognized the power of religious festivities, and in response to that it established “new socialist festivities” instead.⁶¹

The leadership feared that people’s sentiments against this atheist policy might lead them to turn against the Party, so the propaganda dedicated less space to this struggle in mass media – in particular to the destruction of religious monuments – than it gave to other policies of the cultural revolution. It is worth noting that *The People’s Voice* largely omitted mass revolutionary actions against religion, despite a clear desire to promote other public initiatives, which were featured in its pages almost daily in 1967. The older generation especially did not welcome this policy, even though they could do nothing but comply, and sometimes were even forced to support it. Aware of this, the Party instructed the local districts to avoid “public

⁶⁰ Artan R. Hoxha, *Communism, Atheism, and the Orthodox Church of Albania. Cooperation, Survival, and Suppression, 1945-1967*, London & New York: Routledge, 2022.

⁶¹ Tirana, 27 February 1967. Ministry of Education and Culture. Informative report and letter of the Central Committee regarding the struggle against religion and measures to further deepen it, and the new socialist festivities, in AQSH, F.511, V.1967, D.20, f. 12-20.

discussions... everything must be done without fuss”.⁶² Therefore, the struggle against religion had to continue without any leniency, but partially out of sight. The party warned the local committees to be determined but, if possible, to avoid “entering an open conflict with the population”. The Party needed to treat religious people “as the doctor who cures the disease, which turns people towards the joys of life”.⁶³ Here it is possible to characterize the sort of mission the Party assumed itself to serve as one that was salvational for the people and the Party at the same time.

The anti-religious campaign, in just its first months, caused the closure of 2169 religious buildings, 740 mosques, 765 churches and monasteries, and 530 monuments of other religions. The properties were promptly confiscated by the state.⁶⁴ Many of these monuments were razed to the ground, like the monumental Orthodox Cathedral in the center of Tirana, where the state built Hotel Tirana, at the time famous for being the tallest building in the country (15 floors), and still a landmark of the city. This was a way to show that socialism was rising higher from the ashes of the old world. Of all the monuments of worship surveyed in 1967, only 111 had the fortune to be put under state custody as national heritage in the second survey in 1969.⁶⁵ The rest of them, if not

⁶² AQSH, F.511, V.1967, D.20, f. 10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, f. 2-8.

⁶⁴ Informative Report, 7 July 1967, Ministry of Education and Culture. On the first results in the struggle against religion and some measures to further deepen it, in AQSH, F.511, V.1967, D.20, f. 22; Decree Nr. 4263 of the Presidium of the National Assembly, in AQSH, F.511, Ministria e Arsimit dhe e Kulturës [Ministry of Education and Culture], V.1967, D.20, f. 20.

⁶⁵ AQSH, F.511, Ministria e Arsimit dhe e Kulturës [Ministry of Education and Culture], V. 1969, D.66, f.18-20.

razed to the ground, were transformed into weapons depots, small theatres, or even stables for animals.⁶⁶ Some had the better fortune of serving as spaces for “culture houses”.⁶⁷ The use of certain monuments of worship for civic purposes was often dictated not by the goodwill to preserve them, but because the construction of new buildings was expensive. Most of the clergy members also met a sad fate: many were executed after sham trials, and the rest were condemned to long years in work camps and prisons. When the regime fell, in 1991-92, out of hundreds of clergymen from various religions, less than a dozen were still alive.

The destruction of historical monuments of worship also met resistance from the Minister of Education and Culture, Thoma Deljana. In June of 1969, he wrote a letter to Enver Hoxha demanding more care and eventually protection from “this unrestrained desire to artificially deepen the Ideological and Cultural Revolution that is causing violent and extreme actions... In Vlora, there is an insistence on destroying the only ancient monument of the city, the Muradije Mosque. In Fier, trying to remove the cross in the Saint George Church, they destroyed all the architecture... in Saranda, the church from the pre-Ottoman era was turned into a fertilizer depot... the case of the 13th century Church of Vau i Dejës [in the District of Shkodër] is the most

⁶⁶ Ibid., f. 73-80.

⁶⁷ The culture houses (culture halls, *pallatet e kulturës*) were spaces dedicated to artists’ performances – mainly singers, dancers, and theater troupes – where people would usually gather after work. These performances served as part of the Party propaganda, showing the greatness of socialist life and paying tribute to the homeland. They were widespread all over the country, and even the small communes used to have one.

flagrant: it was razed to the ground with explosives”.⁶⁸ Concluding the letter, he asked for these issues to be discussed at the Politburo. Deljana would be purged in 1975, but his concerns were, perhaps, addressed when debates took place in the early 1970s that called for preserving certain religious buildings that could be considered evidence of national cultural heritage. Therefore, some monuments survived: those that were deemed to possess historical importance for architecture, art, and national history.⁶⁹ Moreover, *Monumentet* (*Monuments*) – a journal centred on cultural heritage and architecture – began publication in 1971. Architects and archaeologists were among its main contributors and their debates and contributions in the journal reflect the interest in and emphasis on national architecture, which allowed some religious buildings to be preserved and studied.⁷⁰ The minister’s letter of protest, however, highlights the problematic (and symptomatic) discrepancy between analyses of the cultural revolution focusing on decision-making processes taking place at the highest level and analyses that focus on the lived experience of participants, from party apparatchiks to victims of the purges. The latter types of analyses consistently yield a view of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution that

⁶⁸ Letter of Thoma Deljana to Comrade Enver, Tirana, 24 June 1969, in AQSH F.511, Ministria e Arsimit dhe e Kulturës [Ministry of Education and Culture], V.1969, D.66, f. 67-68.

⁶⁹ Tirana, 11 February 1969. Ministry of Education and Culture. Report and final list of the religious monuments that remain under state preservation, in AQSH, F.511, V.1969, D.66, f. 7-16 and f. 57-66.

⁷⁰ *Monumentet* was published by the Instituti i Monumenteve të Kulturës (Institute of Cultural Monuments). Its issues, from the first one in 1971 to the eighth in 1974, are available in PDF format at: <http://iktk.gov.al/site/rreth-nesh/revista-monumentet-1971-1974/> [last accessed 8 May 2023].

describes a rupture or schism and transformational quality that the former types of analyses do not seem to register.

Another announced objective of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution in Albania was the emancipation of women. The effort to realize this objective became a massive endeavour cutting across different social strata, focused not only on women's emancipation but also on attempting to revolutionize men's views of women. Already in November 1966, during the Fifth Party Congress, Hoxha mentioned the necessity for a leap forward in the emancipation of women. Two days after the piece in *The People's Voice* in early February 1967, news was published of a discussion in a small commune of Gjirokastra, where, the article noted, people asked "to remove the yoke from [women's] backs".⁷¹ In another article, the same newspaper highlighted local actions focused on the emancipation of women across the country.⁷² The campaign also pushed to increase social mobility, moving young girls into universities to study, and towards eventual jobs in urban areas. With the intent of bringing women out of the patriarchal and religious traditions (in particular in rural areas in the North of the country), many young women were mobilized to work in urban, industrial, or infrastructural jobs that ultimately also responded to the necessity to modernize the new socialist woman.

Despite the propagandistic focus on equality between

⁷¹ "Frymëmarrja e fundit e një mbeturine të së kaluarës" ["The final breath of a piece of refuse from the past"], *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People's Voice*], 9 February 1967.

⁷² "Gratë – Forcë e madhe shoqërore në ndërtimin e socializmit" ["Women – A Great Social Force in the Construction of Socialism"], *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People's Voice*], 19 February 1967.

men and women, economic concerns became a crucial reason for the emancipation project. Chinese leaders wondered many times if a small country like Albania could muster a sufficient workforce for the many economic projects that China were financing. In some parts of the country, women were still excluded from public life and access to many offices. This aspect of the revolution intended to bring these women into the economic system. The campaign had little to do with the Chinese version of women's emancipation, and more in common with a similar drive in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, for which revolution meant a rethinking of women's role in the transformation of society.⁷³

There were other causes too, such as political control. In a regime where the only legitimate authority to lead the people and control them was the Party, it was not acceptable to leave a large part of the female population under the rule of their family's male members. In some remote areas of the country, marriage was still arranged during childhood, and women's roles in society were established by these antiquated norms. This, for a part of the population, especially in the countryside, meant living in a parallel situation where old habits were more meaningful than state laws. This situation would not be tolerated any longer by the regime. The population, especially the young and the middle-aged, welcomed this policy and actively supported the female emancipation campaign. Still, even though they were redeemed from their previous condition of servility, women were denied

⁷³ Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 167-434.

many freedoms due to persistent gender norms. The emancipation of women in Albania was far from what feminist movements protested for across Europe in the late 1960s, unbeknownst to many isolated and uninformed Albanian women. On the contrary, many aspects, at least formally, of women's lives in socialist Albania resembled the situation of Soviet women during the second half of the 1930s.⁷⁴ For instance, families were incentivized to have many children, since the state claimed it would take care of all the basic needs for their growth. For this reason, even though abortion was sanctioned as a right, it was discouraged unless for life-saving measures. Similarly, the courts of the time minimized the right to divorce, which on paper was fully guaranteed to women (and to men), and made efforts to pacify couples before granting any requests for divorce.⁷⁵ The campaign, however, promoted equality in the sense of women's participation in public life, and in their access to many important offices.

V. Prepared for Work and War

One of the outcomes of the Albanian Ideological and Cultural Revolution was an increase in economic production. With the building of massive industrial projects, often of dubious

⁷⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 142-156.

⁷⁵ Luljeta Ikonimi and Shannon Woodcock "Imoraliteti në Familje: Nxijtja e Ankesave të Grave për të Përforcuar Pushtetin e Partisë në Revolucionin Kulturor Shqiptar" [[Immorality in the Family: Eliciting women's complaints to further Party power in Albania's cultural revolution](#)], *Përpyekja* vol. 20, no. 32-33, 2014, pp. 155-182.

feasibility, the revolution in Albania became a vehicle of social mobility for thousands of working people who were able to access higher education and get higher positions – such as managerial and administrative jobs – often in urban areas. However, admission to university education was restricted, proportionately to the country's population, to a relatively small number of people. The political background of the family, and membership in the Party - an uneasy status - played a major role. But these constituted one of the main ways to advance in society, similar to the Soviet Union and most socialist countries.⁷⁶

For the Fourth Five Year Plan in 1966-1970 alone, the Party planned the construction of around 60 major industrial plants, in addition to minor projects in light industry (*industria e lehtë*) and construction work on dams, roads, and rail infrastructure.⁷⁷ The regime initially had promised a future of abundance. But continuously delivering a present of scarcity forced the authorities to rethink such promises. Politically the Party condemned those seeking material wellbeing. The Party sought to annihilate any form of individual economic autonomy in favour of a spartan collective life. The communists, Hoxha proclaimed, “should be the first in sacrifices and last in claims... any revisionist and bourgeois concept in life that puts money, luxury, comfort, and personal wellbeing first should be foreign for our people”.⁷⁸ Yet, the industrialization drive of the 1960s and the 1970s renewed people's expectations that the future could

⁷⁶ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, p. 16.

⁷⁷ Politburo records, 11 October 1966, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.21, f. 48.

⁷⁸ Ibid., f. 136-137.

eventually bring material relief if they all played their part. This resulted in the call for mass actions (*aksione*) during which thousands of people would contribute – often with their bare hands – to industrial and infrastructural projects across the country. They performed tasks that required no particular training or skills, making up with their muscles for the lack of adequate equipment, such as machinery for removing large amounts of earth and debris, or opening new roads with barely any shovels at their disposal. The campaign was initially successful. The District of Korça reported that the workforce in economic projects increased from 20 to 25 thousand, and there was room for more. This workforce had made possible an over-fulfillment of the planned target, and had contributed to increasing the arable land.⁷⁹ Another aspect of this campaign was addressing problems with unemployment. In the city of Korça alone there were around two to three thousand young people who had no occupation. The situation was similar in many urban areas of Albania, and Party officials from Durrës, Shkodër, Dibër, Fier, Vlorë, and other districts reported comparable numbers.⁸⁰ Thus, the campaign served to redistribute an urban workforce that was unemployed as a consequence of the population growth after the Second World War.

These *aksione* consisted primarily of young people, resembling China's educated youth (*zhìqīng*, also called the “sent-down youth”) who were sent from urban areas to villages.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Tirana, 4 March 1966. Minutes of the meeting of the Party Plenum, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.9, f. 133.

⁸⁰ Ibid., f. 134.

⁸¹ Tania Branigan, *Red Memory. Living, Remembering, and Forgetting China's Cultural Revolution*, London: Guardian Faber Publishing, 2023;

In Albania, the initiative to send people from the cities to rural areas was met with some resistance as people tried to be exempt from such a move.⁸² But for the regime, it was also a necessary policy in order to unify the culturally distinct northern and southern parts of the country, which is why the exchanges consisted of people from the South moving temporarily to the North and vice versa. Other changes clearly resembled those in China as well: from the early spring of 1966, physical exercises became widespread in working units and state institutions, often performed outside the buildings in the early morning.⁸³ In the education system, all schools introduced military preparation classes (*zbor*) in addition to strengthening the physical prowess of the students, developing a siege mentality across the country.⁸⁴ There is, however, a significant difference from China. The Chinese Cultural Revolution caused a huge disruption in education and the closing of universities for many years. The cultural revolution in Albania instead promoted more education, and also aimed to create a proletarian intelligentsia, which in turn could raise the mass cultural level and also the level of technical skills. The Albanian leaders understood in fact that education – as Gail Warshofsky Lapidus put it a long time ago in his research on the Soviet Union – was “the key to the cultural revolution that

Guobin Yang “China’s Zhiqing Generation: Nostalgia, Identity, and Cultural Resistance in the 1990s”, *Modern China* vol. 23, no. 3, 2003, pp. 267-296.

⁸² Tirana, 4 March 1966. Minutes of the meeting of the party plenum, in AQSH, F.14, AP-OU, V.1966, D.9, f. 129.

⁸³ Tirana, 6 July 1966. Ministry of Education and Culture – Directorate of physical culture and sports. Letter to all districts regarding the method and style at work, in AQSH, F.511, Ministry of Education, V.1966, D.48, f. 2-15.

⁸⁴ Ministry of Education and Culture, 6 July 1966. Report on method and work style sent to all districts, in AQSH, F.511, V.1966, D.48.

would create a society at once socialist and modern”.⁸⁵ In Albania, education became an important place where the power of science and technology was highlighted. But it also played a major role in reshaping the function of studying the humanities, through the elaboration of tradition, oral stories, and national myths, after carefully rewriting its narrative no longer as a perpetuation of old social hierarchies and values, but as the means of forging a new nationalist and socialist human being at the same time.⁸⁶

The flow of people went both ways, however. Whereas targeted campaigns mobilized people from urban areas to work in rural areas on specific projects or farms, there was also a flow that brought people into new urban settlements. As in the Soviet and Chinese cases, since industrial construction became the priority of the five-year plans during the 1960s and 1970s, building towns around these projects was also important.⁸⁷ This construction drive took on the traits of socialist civilization, with all that it entailed, similar to the experiment in the 1930s in the Soviet Union.⁸⁸ The new urban settlements in Albania, formed

⁸⁵ Gail Warshofsky Lapidus, “Educational Strategies and Cultural Revolution: The Politics of Soviet Development”, in Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia*, pp. 78-104 (p. 80).

⁸⁶ Decades ago, Kenneth Jowitt argued that all Leninist systems, “are interested in the selective reintegration of tradition only *after* the political relevance of tradition has been decisively altered”. See: Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p. 115. Cited in Gail Warshofsky Lapidus “Educational Strategies and Cultural Revolution: The Politics of Soviet Development”, p. 100.

⁸⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 45-54.

⁸⁸ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Kotkin’s study is focused on the building

around industrial project worksites, became political devices that created a new form of living in the community. This zeal for construction, which went on during the 1960s and the 1970s, created new urban spaces and forms of social engagement and political participation that were unlike the collective farms in the countryside. Professionals and specialists were meant to transform into proletarians, and their duties assumed a new dimension, that of the mission to build socialism. Political non-engagement became suspicious, and thus political militancy the norm.

Contrary to China, where the economy greatly suffered in the first wave of the Cultural Revolution, in Albania economic production during this period increased dramatically. Many infrastructural works were completed. To increase agricultural output in Albania, personal yards, consisting of small plots of lands around homes, were drastically reduced, and most of the rural economy was transformed into land for collective agricultural production. These measures, however harsh, were considered necessary because it was the only way “to demolish the remaining feudal bourgeoisie”.⁸⁹ This top-down approach to implementing the collectivization of property across all levels of land ownership, including the small lots of land peasants had in the mountains, together with their herds of domestic animals, ultimately impoverished many households.

of the new city of Magnitogorsk in the Urals, and the associated steel plant – one of the greatest industrial centres of the time in the Soviet Union.

⁸⁹ “Të gjithë me të gjitha forcat për revolucionarizimin e mëtejshëm të Partisë dhe të pushtetit” [“All Together with All Our Might for the Further Revolutionization of the Party and People’s Power”], *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People’s Voice*], 11 February 1967.

VI. Performing the Revolution

One of the ways of practicing the revolution in Albania was to use the Albanian version of *dazibao* (called “big character posters” in English), known as *fletërrufe*.⁹⁰ It is a term composed of two words, *fletë*, which means page or sheet, and the word *rrufe*, which means lightning or thunderbolt. *Fletërrufe* were wall newspapers, pages written to criticize – and sometimes attack – someone or something. They were posted in public spaces, and accorded high importance, since they served as “powerful tools for the ideological-political and moral education of the masses”.⁹¹ The mobilization of students and the *fletërrufe* were indeed similar to the practices of the Cultural Revolution in China. The key difference was that these *fletërrufe* did not become instruments used by different groups to struggle against

⁹⁰ “Iniciativë revolucionare e nxënësve dhe pedagogëve të shkollës ‘Naim Frashëri’ në Durrës. Në shpatën e mprehtë të ideologjisë së partisë kundër ideologjisë fetare, paragjykimeve, bestytive e zakoneve prapanike” [“Revolutionary initiative of the students and teachers at the ‘Naim Frashëri’ school in Durrës. On the sharp sword of the Party’s ideology against religious ideology, prejudices, superstitions and backward customs”], *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People’s Voice*], 8 February 1967; regarding the phenomenon of *dazibao* in China, see the recent contribution of Xing Lu: Lu Xing, *Rhetoric of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Impact on Chinese Thought, Culture, and Communication*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2004, pp. 28-50; For a quick view and explanation of the *dazibao* please see the accurate information at the website of the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University: <https://fairbank.fas.harvard.edu/research/exhibitions/dazibao-and-woodcuts-from-1960s-china/>.

⁹¹ “Ti bëjme fletë-rrufetë një mjet të fuqishëm për edukimin ideopolitik e moral të masave” [“Let’s make the lightning-sheet a powerful tool for the ideological-political and moral education of the masses”], *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People’s Voice*], 1 April 1967.

each other, nor did they inspire violence as the *dazibao* did in China. The students in Albania never held the power the Red Guards did, nor did they play so great a role. The similarity, therefore, was limited to their form.

Another policy that became widespread, was the promotion of sessions of “accountability”, consisting of self-criticisms of Party officials and people in posts of responsibility at different levels. This required open discussions in the Party’s base organizations, meaning the local parties of each economic unit, each factory or institution, and each commune. In these organizations, the masses could fulfill their true role, in collective criticism sessions similar to the Chinese “struggle sessions”. These sessions of accountability and criticism took place across urban settlements and rural areas, targeting everyone from the former landowners, to professionals among the industrial proletariat, and local Party officials. However, Hoxha warned that these sessions must never become battlefields because “our party is not an arena for developing the class struggle”. Thus, these sessions rarely resulted in acts of collective violence against their targets. If revisionism never came to power in Albania, according to Hoxha it was because of these rules, and because “the Party is not a den of people without ideology”. It is thus clear that, unlike in China, in Albania, the leadership saw itself as being above the masses and not subject to their criticism, because “our party has at its foundation... democratic centralism... a central leadership... All the other organs must obey and apply their decisions”.⁹² Yet again, by carefully defining the framework within which sessions on criticism and

⁹² *Zëri i Popullit* [*The People's Voice*], 7 February 1967.

accountability could take place, the Party prevented them from derailing into forums where the Party line could be questioned.

VII. Conclusion: Never Ending

While China's Cultural Revolution came to an official conclusion in 1976 – and, for Mao, in 1969 – Albania's cultural revolution had no such finale. In a way, it had never started either. On the other hand, the Albanian Ideological and Cultural Revolution, through a pervasive ideologization of all aspects of life, made it possible for the Party to forge and shape a new generation of communist loyalists who were born after the Second World War, and thus less susceptible to influences from the remote past. This was perhaps the most significant legacy of the revolution for Hoxha's regime, and for him personally. In fact, at the end of his life, after having purged all his lifelong comrades, only loyal people were left around him. After his death, the first promise they made to the Albanian people was to always follow Hoxha's line. This continuation was indeed a mark of the socialist regime since its foundation. The Albanian Ideological and Cultural Revolution was carried on under the auspices of continuing the socialist policies of the Party, and in this sense, it was less disruptive than the experiments under the same name in the Soviet Union during the first Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), and the more recent one in China in the mid 1960s. In Albania, improvisation, experimentalism, and initiative from below were limited to targeted policies and specific projects in the economy. In a way, the revolution aimed to reinforce, and move forward what had been achieved under socialism so far,

rather than disrupt with a fresh start, as in the Soviet and Chinese experiments. Additionally, Albanian social, intellectual, and cultural pluralism was already strictly controlled since the early years of communist rule. The aim was more to align the many forces in society with the ideological and economic policies of the regime.

Ultimately, however, the Albanian Ideological and Cultural Revolution ended up more closely resembling the Soviet Union's experiment in the 1930s than China's Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. This reflects the many similarities in society between the Soviet Union in the 1930s and Albania's post-Second World War conditions, such as – among others – a party made up of a strong (albeit small) urban working class, the necessity to develop heavy industry, and powerful leadership. But is also a reflection of the fact that Albanian communist leader Enver Hoxha had similar political aims to Stalin's in the 1930s, meaning that he intended to consolidate his own personal political power. This is not to say that initiatives from below were absent – on the contrary. But the people were involved only after such initiatives had been approved at the central level. Moreover, they often responded to the necessities of economics and production, rather than developing pluralism and debates in society. Ultimately, the mass campaigns and people's involvement ended up reinforcing the Party and its leader, and to a certain extent increasing economic production through the inclusion of vast strata of society – such as women – on a larger scale than previously in the workforce. Finally, the Ideological and Cultural Revolution was more about ideology, politics, and economy than culture. It served the Party's aim of maintaining a

firm line of action without external disruptions and influences that may have undermined it. In the end, however, as a result of this revolution, Albania became more isolated, leaving the younger population less exposed to foreign influences that were considered dangerous, and with a general sense of resignation.⁹³

⁹³ I want to thank the editor of the journal *Art Studies*, Jonida Gashi, for her insightful comments and the review of the several versions of the article. I am grateful to Raino Isto for his generous help with the many sources used here and for his comments on the first and second versions of the article. Many thanks also to Anxhela Çikopano for her help with the translation of the article into Albanian.

