

Konstantinos GIAKOUMIS

**GEORGE CASTRIOTA SCANDERBEG AND ENVER HOXHA'S
IMAGE-MAKING: THE FIRST POST-WORLD II READING
PRIMERS IN ALBANIA¹**

This paper investigates the appropriation of the legendary figure of George Castriota Scanderbeg by Enver Hoxha since the earliest days of Albania's communist regime. To this end, I am analyzing from an iconological perspective the juxtaposition of Enver Hoxha and George Castriota Scanderbeg's images on the first pages of the very first reading primers after the end of the World War II. In so doing, this paper builds up previous work of the late Gëzim Qëndro on the relation of Enver Hoxha with the equestrian statue of George Castriota Scanderbeg at Tirana's central square. The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates one of the early ways how the communist regime engaged in legitimizing its rule and fostering the new Albanian socialist man through reading primers for children. To this end, through the analysis of two 1946 reading primers for children, the communist regime did so by utilizing various combinations and interactions of people and ideas both during the liberation war, as well as shortly after it.

In the portrayal of the leader, among other people, in these early post-World War II primers one observes the majority of political legitimacy types of messages represented in illustrations of History textbooks during the communist regime: i) the Messianic anticipation of the leader, ii) the personality and charisma of the leader, iii) people take sides, iv) regime acceptance and acceptance; v) and regime achievements. To decipher the latent meaning in the pictures under consideration I am using iconology as a method of enquiry. Iconology places much emphasis on the setting of imagery, both place setting and time setting (Panofsky 1974, 27, 32). It also delves into texts in an

¹ This presentation is part of the lectures segment run from 1-2 November 2018.

attempt to identify linkages between them and imagery (Mitchell 1986, van Straten 2007). Before analyzing the images under consideration, I ought to mention a few words about education in Albania after the World War II and the first educational priorities of the communist party.

The temporary government which emerged shortly before the celebrated liberation of Albania (November 29, 1944) from the National Antifascist Liberation Council declared that after the war the organs of the state would be directly elected from the people (Dyrmishi 2009, 174-5). In January 11, 1946 the Constituent Assembly declared Albania a popular republic; having been warned ahead of time, all the churches in Albania were required to toll their bells at the time that the decree of the Constituent Assembly was to be announced (Pearson 2006, 3). In educational matters, the state had to face a rather grave situation with widespread illiteracy, poor schooling network, low number of teachers rather unwell educated, as well as poor educational infrastructure.

The tone of the new government educational policies was set by Enver Hoxha himself. In his report to the 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Albania in October 17, 1944, he summarizes the educational agenda as follows (*Enver Hoxha Speaks*, 41, 42):

The question of education should become the concern of the entire Party. What should be the educational policy of our Party and state? Everyone should be educated. We must fight illiteracy and make elementary schooling compulsory for all, we must try to provide the younger generation with a sound general education, channel the largest and most dependable section of the youth into the branches of agriculture and industry, train reliable cadres as teachers, and increase their numbers. We must do away with the attitude that "even without education and culture we can do everything."...

...
For the time being, we are compelled to work according to the old programs, paying attention to the way history, education, psychology, and moral education are taught, because in these subjects teachers with the old mentality could easily confuse the youth, and head them not in the way we want them to go, but in the opposite direction.

References to how a new society in Albania should be built were already made in the programme of the first government (*Enver Hoxha Speaks*, 50, 54). The role of primary education thereof was instrumental; according to the statements in this programme: *“Educational reform and changes in school programs will be the first tasks of the government in the educational field. The reform and the changes in the programs will take into account the conditions created in our country, and the needs emerging in the process of the construction of new Albania.”* (*Enver Hoxha Speaks*, 55).

A new law on educational reform was approved in August 1946. The 1981 *History of the Labour Party of Albania* (Instituti 1981, 210) assessed this reform in the following words:

The Cultural Revolution was firstly expressed in the Educational Reform of August 1946. According to this reform, education became general, free of charge, equal, lay and in mother tongue. Schools were of full state character and got unified. ...Education became mandatory throughout the Republic. New curricula, educational plans and textbooks were developed with new content. Primary schools opened in every village. Besides these, a concentrated campaign was conducted to annihilate illiteracy.

New reading primers for adults were published in 1945 for both major lingual groups in Albania: Ghegs and Tosks. In a report read in the name of the government in the third session of the National Antifascist Liberation Council dated September 26, 1945, Enver Hoxha declared that primers and other reading texts were printed for all classes of primary schools (Hoxha 1979, 20).

My study was based on the earliest post-World-War-II reading primers for elementary education pupils to be found in Tirana's National Library. There are two identical 72-pages-long reading primers published by a Pedagogical Commission of the Ministry of Education without mention of authors or members in 1946. One of them is written in the Tosk dialect (Southern Albania) and the other in the Gheg dialect (Northern Albania). The reason for which there are two dialects might be related to the desire of the communist party to increase its impact in Northern Albania and dilute the impression that the standardized national language was mostly inclined towards the Tosk idiom. Their structure follows the well-established order of

reading primers, whereby the first part is devoted to the analytic-synthetic learning of the alphabet, while the latter part contains larger texts for fluent reading. The textbook's text and imagery follow the structure of having a square image at the top and text at the bottom. The combination thereof violently upholds the new regime's legitimacy by constructing a double narrative of people and events during the war and after it. While people appear to be in some sort of interaction with other people, leaders appear to stand alone, the figure of Enver Hoxha appears to unify these two phases; his sole interaction, as we shall demonstrate, is with the selected most glorious part of history in Albania.

On the first page of the reading primer, there is a photograph of Enver Hoxha (**Fig. 1**) accompanied by the subtitle: "Gjen. Kol. ENVER HOXHA" (General Colonel Enver Hoxha) (Komisioni 1946, 1). Thereafter (Komisioni 1946, 3), there is a drawn medal bearing the figure of Scanderbeg (**Fig. 2**) in the iconography that would be standardized in the course of the communist regime. Scanderbeg is represented in a square frame, below which the following text can be read: *EEE | ENVER | ENVERI HERO KOMBËTAR | RROFTË ENVERI YNË* (Eee; Enver; Enver, national hero; long live our Enver). The association between George Castriota Scanderbeg and Enver Hoxha and the appropriation of the former's heritage and memory to serve the political ends of the latter could not be more conspicuous. Thus, by way of text and imagery combined, one observes the following message types of political legitimacy promoted in the 1946 primers: **i)** the Messianic anticipation of the leader; **ii)** the personality and charisma of the leader; **iii)** the leader's achievements, paralleled to that of the legendary figure of George Castriota Scanderbeg.



Fig. 1 Colonel, Enver Hoxha.



Fig.2: Scanderbeg and Enver Hoxha.

Other message types of political legitimacy sought through primers are to be found further on [Komisioni 1946, 28]. At the top left of the page (**Fig. 3**) there is a photograph of Enver Hoxha below which the subtitle “ENVERI”; at the top right of the page a photograph of Tito, again identified with an inscription. At the bottom of the page, a throng of black-figured, impersonalized demonstrators advance to the right of the page holding flags and banners. The page, in which one can recognize the: i) people take sides, and ii) regime acceptance and acceptance message types of political legitimacy sought through primers reads:

PARADA NË TIRANË PIJONERËT LËVIZIM ME HAP: NJË, DY..., NJË, DY..., TRUPË NDAL! PËR NDER ARMË! POPULLI BËRTET: ENVER! ENVER! E I JEP TUFA ME LULE PIJONERËT BERTITËN MË FORT: RROFTË FLAMURI! RROFTË ENVERI! RROFTË TITO! NE JEMI ME ENVERIN! ... NE JEMI ME ENVERIN!... ENVER TITO, ENVER TITO!	The Parade in Tirana The pioneers move with steps: One, two, one, two, soldier stop! Present arms! The people shouts: Enver! Enver! And gives him a bunch of flowers. The pioneers shout more loudly: Long live the flag! Long live Enver! Long live Tito! We are with Enver! We are with Enver! Enver Tito, Enver Tito!
---	--



Fig. 3: Enver Hoxha and Josip Broz Tito.

In his *Le Surréalisme Socialiste, L'Autopsie de l'Utopie* the late Gëzim Qëndro argues for a particular and rather peculiar Father-Son relation between George Castriota Scanderbeg and Enver Hoxha (2013, 140-1). According to him:

La symétrie de leur destin était claire : deux hommes d'État, les plus illustres de l'histoire de l'Albanie, appelés par l'Histoire pour sauver leur patrie. Si Scanderbeg était surnommé par les papes Pie II et Adrien VI « bouclier du christianisme » à cause de sa défense de la religion officielle de l'Occident, le christianisme, Hodja se présente comme bouclier de la religion officielle de l'Est, le communisme. Un autre point commun est le

fait que tous les deux sont présentés par l'historiographie officielle comme des hommes d'État qui considéraient la défense de la religion (ou de l'idéologie totalitaire) comme étant indissociable de la défense de leur patrie, de l'identité ethnique de la nation et de l'intégrité territoriale du pays.

In another study, titled “Paradigma të Narcisizmit Kolektiv” dealing with Scanderbeg's monuments, Gëzim Qëndro [13.05.2006, 24-5] was certain that Scanderbeg's warlike imagery in his Kruja square statue (1949-1951), executed by Janaq Paço, was precisely the revolutionary attitude the regime promoted at the time. After all, as an 11.02.1968 article in the daily *Drita* instructed: “in treating historical matter we have to be driven from lessons of the Party and of Comrade Enver Hoxha; to look the past with the contemporary political eye, so that works of art would not merely provide a straightforward interpretations of events, but rather actively bear the ideas of the party, to inspire a militant spirit to the people for socialism, to serve the communist formation of the wider masses of workers.” (in Hoxha 2014, 79). Fifty years ago, the placement of a leader-like type of Scanderbeg statue in the homonym square was aimed at alluding the contemporary leader, Enver Hoxha, as one could figure out from the artists' (Janaq Paço, Odhise Paskali and Andrea Mano) relevant statements. After Paskali: “Thought was for a Scanderbeg as military leader and as statesman, a man of his epoch, conscious of the glory and dangers of the cruel wars of the Albanian people” [in Hoxha 2014, 99]. Discussing about their concept to the daily *Drita* in 29.04.1962 the artists showed an accurate understanding of the instructions as to how history should be rendered in places of memory: “We liked to represent Scanderbeg, our national hero, as a military leader and as a leader of the state, in our awareness that these were two aspects which comprised the whole personality of George Castriota. Hence, the idea of representing him as a leader of the Albanian people: he stands proud and undefeated at the head of his people and he leaders it against the conquerors. He is conscious about the big case” (in Hoxha 2014, 99).

I have no hesitation that “the big case” is related to Enver Hoxha and the mission which the communist regime saw for itself. For those in doubt, here is a passage from Ismail Kadare's *Pashallëqe të Mëdha*,

1978 [Kadare 1989, 97], in which the late Gëzim Qëndro saw another parallel between Scanderbeg and Enver Hoxha:

Covertly, he (n.a. Ali Pasha) was jealous of the founder of the Albanian state at the time, Scanderbeg of the Castriota family [...] he had successfully revolted against the sultan and [...] had recreated Albania. On the other hand, Ali Pasha was late. [...] He fed even greater jealousy towards the future statesman who would successfully accomplish this. For he sensed this was to occur one day. He was entirely convinced. And even if he was not yet born, the future one, the unknown, the founder of Albania, his father could perhaps have been born, and if not, most certainly his grandfather of this world.[...] He was to come after centuries-long anticipation to recreate what had faded out after Scanderbeg's death. Thus, he was Scanderbeg, the past and the future one and between them Ali Pasha of Tepelena, the thunderous vizier who was unaware of the place history would reserve for him.

Regrettably, Gëzim Qëndro passed away very young, before having the opportunity to discuss extensively about the findings of my research presented in this conference. He would have been pleased for his right intuition. Enver Hoxha indeed appropriated the legendary figure of George Castriota Scanderbeg since the earliest days of Albania's communist regime.

WORKS CITED

Dyrmishi, Demir. 2009. "Vendosja e Regjimit Komunist (1945-1960): Organizimi i Regjimit Komunist." In *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar IV*, edited by Xhelal Gjeçovi, 168-76. Tirana: Toena.

Hoxha, Enver. 1979. *Për Arsimin dhe Edukatën (Përmbledhje Veprash)*. Tirana: «8 Nëntori» Publ.

Hoxha, Enver. N.d. *Enver Hoxha Speaks*. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hoxha/works/hoxha-\speaks.\pdf>, accessed in 17.10.2019.

Hoxha, Ermir. 2014. *Arti në Shqipëri, 1945-1990*. Ph.D. diss. University of Tirana, Faculty of History and Philology, Department of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage. Tirana.

Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste pranë KQ të PPSH, 1981. *Historia e Parti së Punës së Shqipërisë*, 2nd edition. Tirana: «8 Nëntori» Publ.

Kadare, Ismail. 1989. *Vepra Letrare*, 9. Tirana: Naim Frashëri.

Komisioni Pedagogjik. 1946. *Abetare*. Tirana: Botimi Ministrisë së Arsimit.

Mitchell, William John Thomas. 1986, *Iconology: Images, Text, Ideology*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Panofsky, Erwin. 1974. *Meaning in the Visual Arts*. Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press.

Pearson, Owen. 2006. *Albania as Dictatorship and Democracy. From Isolation to the Kosovo War (1946-1998)*. Vol. 3. London and New York: The Centre for Albanian Studies and Tauris.

Qëndro, Gëzim. 13.05.2006. “Paradigma të Narcisizmit Kolektiv. Monumenti i Skënderbeut, Ikona e Nacionalizmit Shqiptar”. *Standard* 153, 24-5. vgg

Qëndro, Gëzim. 2013. *Le Surréalisme Socialiste, L'Autopsie de l'Utopie*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Van Straten, Roelof. 2007. *An Introduction to Iconography*, translated by Patricia de Man. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, digital printing.

