

# **GJERGJ KASTRIOTI SKANDERBEG AND ENVER HOXHA IN ALBANIAN GRAPHIC NOVELS PUBLISHED IN CHILDREN'S MAGAZINES DURING THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN ALBANIA**

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**Abstract:** *During the communist regime in Albania (1945–1990), culture and art were fully put at the service of Marxist–Leninist ideology and the project of building a “new socialist man”. Within this framework, children’s literature, including illustrated stories and graphic novels, became an educational instrument to convey patriotic, revolutionary and collectivist values. The magazines “Fatosi”, “Yllkat” and “Pionieri” became important platforms for the dissemination of historical figures interpreted in the spirit of Albanian socialist realism. Two of the central figures were the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and the dictator Enver Hoxha, presented as two symbolic pillars of national and political identity during this period.*

*This scientific study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines content analysis, iconographic interpretation and examination of the ideological context. Selected graphic novels from these magazines are analyzed, with the aim of shedding light on the symbolic function of historical representations, the visual strategies used, and the ideological mechanisms present in the literary and visual narrative. The comparison between the mythical figure of Skanderbeg and the political figure of Enver Hoxha helps to highlight the intertwining of national myth with communist propaganda.*

*Thus, children’s magazines served not only for education, but also for the ideological indoctrination of younger generations in communist Albania.*

**Keywords:** *Albanian graphic novel, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, Enver Hoxha, art history, the Albanian communist regime, children’s magazine.*

## **Introduction**

During the communist regime in Albania from 1945 to 1990, culture and art were put at the service of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the construction of the “new socialist man”. Within this context, children’s literature, including novels and illustrated stories, were also used as an

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ideological instrument to educate the younger generations with patriotic, revolutionary and collectivist values. Two of the most important children's magazines of the time, "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri", served as extraordinary platforms for the dissemination of historical figures interpreted according to these principles. Among them was the legendary unifying figure of the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg as a representative of the national heroism of the Albanians against the Ottoman invaders and the figure of the dictator Enver Hoxha as a representative of absolute power during the communist expansion in Albania<sup>1</sup>. Both of these central characters of Albanian history represent two diametrically opposed approaches to historical representation as part of the interpretation through the artistic genre of the graphic novel published in the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri".

This chapter aims to analyze the way in which the figure of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg was instrumentalized in the Albanian graphic novels published in these two magazines during the communist regime, examining their symbolic function, visual methodology and ideological content<sup>2</sup>. The comparison of the two figures serves to understand the interplay between historical myth and political propaganda, as well as the way in which children were educated through a controlled and directed reading of history.

Through an interdisciplinary analysis of content, iconography and ideological context, we will examine the function that these representations had in shaping the historical and cultural awareness of children during the communist dictatorship of the proletariat in Albania.

From an analytical perspective, it is very important to highlight the ideological indoctrinating dimension within the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri", in order to understand how, to what extent and what was the level of influence on the formation of children during communism.

Magazines such as "Fatosi" (published from 1945), "Yllkat" (published from 1971) and "Pionieri" (published from 1943) had a clear educational mission in accordance with the directives of the Party of Labor of Albania. They promoted a kind of pedagogy of patriotic indoctrination, where national history coincided with the values of the anti-fascist war, resistance against the "foreign and domestic enemy" and loyalty to the party and especially the "universal" leader Enver Hoxha. The historical figuration in these magazines was not free, but filtered and conceived as an instrument for the legitimization of political power and for the construction of a unified, socialist identity.

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<sup>1</sup> B. J. Fischer, *Albania at War, 1939–1945*, Hurst, London, 1999, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup> O. Pearson, *Albania in the Twentieth Century, Vol. III: Albania after Tito, Stalin, and Hoxha*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2006, p. 142–46.

The graphic novel, in this context, constituted an attractive and effective way to introduce these ideologies into the minds of children, through a combination of visual stories, simplified dialogues and characters that embodied the ideal of the young man.

It should be remembered that “Fatosi”, “Yllkat” and “Pionieri” were primarily state-run magazines for the dissemination of socialist education among children. In these publications, the content was enriched with didactic stories, poems, songs and patriotic essays which were illustrated by the most prominent artists of that period through the artistic genre of the graphic novel that was supported and dictated by the spirit of socialist realism. These novels served as tools to convey political messages, to elevate the party leader, and to create an emotional and ideological connection between children and historical figures who conveyed the values of socialism<sup>3</sup>.

The structure of children's literature was simple and straightforward: a conflict between good and evil, where the figure of the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and that of the communist dictator Enver Hoxha represented the forces of light, while the enemies of the people - whether foreign invaders or internal traitors - represented the evil that had to be defeated at all costs.

### **1. Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg in graphic novels: from national hero to ideological figure**

The figure of the Albanian national hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, occupied a privileged place in children's magazines, especially in "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri", where he occasionally appeared in the form of illustrated stories or multi-page graphic novels. In accordance with the official historiographical narrative of the time, Skanderbeg was depicted as a popular leader, who carried out not only a military mission against the Ottomans, but also an ideological mission to free the people from the "shackles of slavery".

In these graphic novels, he was often depicted in epic scenes: on horseback, with a flag in his hand, leading the army, or in heroic moments of personal sacrifice for the people<sup>4</sup>. His dialogues were loaded with political rhetoric, with expressions like “for the homeland and for the people” or “against the invader and the traitor”, where unyielding heroism prevailed in the face of Albania’s invaders. He often faced negative characters who represented the figure of the “class enemy” – traitors, feudal lords or

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<sup>3</sup> N. Whybrow, *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television, 1800–2000*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p. 201.

<sup>4</sup> K. Frashëri, *Skanderbeg: Life and Works*, Botimet Toena, Tiranë, 2002, p. 211.

collaborators of the Turks, creating a clear parallel with the approach and internal mentality of the class struggle in socialist Albania.

The visual style used in illustrating children's literature through the artistic genre of the graphic novel was clear and realistic, with an almost "neorealist" spirit, which reinforced the credibility and seriousness of the message that this art conveyed to the masses of young age groups<sup>5</sup>. Through the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri", children learned about Skanderbeg not only as a historical figure, but above all as an ideological precursor of the communist fighter.

Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg was a figure that the communist regime appropriated and reconceptualized in accordance with the narrative of class struggle and resistance to the invader. In the graphic novels published inside the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri", Skanderbeg was not only presented as a military strategist, but as an almost prophetic figure, who in a way foresaw the need for popular unity and the fight for freedom, concepts that were fundamental in communist indoctrination propaganda.

Through multifaceted and dramatic scenes, several features stand out in the visual description of Skanderbeg's figure, such as: tall, proud, always among the common people, leader of glorious battles, always ready to confront traitors and protector of the Albanian people. Therefore, many artists have idealized the figure of Skanderbeg through multi-page graphic novels, presenting him as a heroic example of sacrifice. Artistically, he was depicted with strong masculine features: a thick beard, a determined gaze and magnificent clothing. His dialogues contained strong patriotic tones and clear ideological allusions: "The people are my strength", "Freedom is won with blood", etc.

Thus, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg was not only a figure of the past, but also an instrumentalized figure who legitimized the anti-fascist war and Hoxha's regime as the historical continuation of the Albanian resistance against external and internal enemies. This is evidenced by the numerous graphic novels published in the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri" in the 60s and 70s, where we highlight some of them such as: *"An extraordinary journey of Krekos"* written by Bedri Dedja and illustrated by Safoi Marko, "Fatosi", November 1962, p. 10-12, *"The Dream of Darit"* written by Hysen Çela and illustrated by Agim Faja, "Fatosi", January 1967, p. 14-16, *"The Little Explorer"* written by Paulin Sekuj and illustrated by Dollji Gjinali, "Fatosi", February 1967, p. 6-9, *"The Bravery of the Bardhe Village"* written by Frederik Reshpja and illustrated by Agim Faja, "Fatosi", April 1967, p. 12-15, Fifth National Children's Song Festival in Shkodër, cover of the magazine "Fatosi" illustrated by Agima Faja, no. 5, May 1967,

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<sup>5</sup> P. Morgan, *Ismail Kadare: The Writer and the Dictatorship 1957–1990*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, p. 76.

“*Arbëri never dies*” written by Skënder Drini and illustrated by Safo Marko, “Fatosi”, June 1967, p. 18-19, “*Everything came out victorious*” written by the student Vlash Zeka (Blinisht, Lezhë) and illustrated by Pandi Mele, “Fatosi”, August 1967, p. 9, “*The Little Shepherd and Skanderbeg*” written by Klito Fundo, “Fatosi”, September 1967, p. 8-9, 29 November 1944-1967, cover of the magazine “Fatosi” illustrated by Pandi Mele, no. 11, November 1967, “*As in the time of Skanderbeg*” illustrated by Spiro, “Fatosi”, December 1967, p. 18-19, “*Bust of Skanderbeg*” written by Aristotel Mici and illustrated by Buron Kaceli, “Fatosi”, December 1967, p. 20, cover and undercover of the magazine “Fatosi” illustrated by Agima Faja, no. 1, January 1968, “*Skanderbeg on the banks of Drini*” written by Naum Prifti and illustrated by Bujar Zajmi, “Fatosi”, no. 7 (285), April 1, 1977, XVIII Year of Publication, p. 16-18, “*The Source of Skanderbeg*” written by Naum Prifti and illustrated by Naxhi Bakalli, “Fatosi”, no. 22 (299), November 19, 1977, XVIII Year of Publication, p. 20-23, “*Kapidan Sani*” written by Naum Prifti and illustrated by Llambi Blido, “Pionieri”, no. 14, July 1977, p. 24-27, “*The Legend of Skanderbeg*” written by Rahman Dedaj, “Fatosi”, no. 3 (328), February 5, 1979, XX Year of Publication, p. 2-3, “*Fires*” written by Sulejman Mato and illustrated by Anastas Kostandini, “Fatosi”, no. 7 (308), April 5, 1978, XIX Year of Publication, p. 16-19, “*Breand and Head of Malçi*” written by Naum Prifti and illustrated by Anastas Kostandini, “Fatosi”, no. 17 (318), 5 September 1978, 19th Year of Publication, p. 16-19, “*Skanderbeg tries the sword*” written by Naum Prifti and illustrated by Safo Marko, “Yllkat”, October 1977, p. 5-7 and “*A handful of water*” written by Odhise Grillo and illustrated by Artur Muharremi, “Yllkat”, November 1986, p. 6-8.

In January 1968, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the death of the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg (1468–1968), the children's magazine "Fatosi" published several graphic novels dedicated to his figure, where it is worth analyzing two of them, entitled: the first "*The Last Order of Gjergj Kastrioti*", pp. 3-4 and the second "*Skanderbeg and Ballabani*", pp. 5-7. These two works were created by the Albanian artist Dolli Gjinali and represent an advanced form of visual and educational communication language of the time with historical content. Both graphic novels are structured as comic strips with narrative elements and direct dialogues. These graphic novels were addressed to the new generations at a historical moment when the communist regime of the time was trying to reinforce feelings of patriotism and national identity through visual art and propaganda.

In this regard, it is important to delve into an analysis of the narrative structure and historical content, as both graphic novels by the artist Gjinali convey certain messages. The diverse scenes that shape these two graphic

novels build a consistent narrative on two related themes: Skanderbeg's moral legacy and the confrontation with internal betrayal.

In the first graphic novel "*Skanderbeg's Last Order*", the figure of Skanderbeg is presented in the last moments of his life. Despite being sick and tired from the years of war, he gathers with his comrades and the people to leave them a sacred legacy: to continue the fight for freedom, not to surrender, and never to forget the country for which he gave his life. This graphic novel conveys a meaningful educational and patriotic message: Skanderbeg does not die as an individual, but becomes an immortal symbol of Albanian resistance against the Ottoman invaders, but translated into the communist ideology of the time, this refers to its external and internal enemies.

This appropriation of Skanderbeg's heroism is clearly demonstrated by the Hoxha regime in the last scene of the graphic novel, replacing Skanderbeg's brave men with his partisans fighting and shooting Nazi-fascist enemies with machine guns. A scene that balances Skanderbeg's heroism with that of the partisans, which we also read in the upper part of this scene: "*And the fight for freedom continues even after Skanderbeg's death.*"<sup>6</sup>.

In scene no. 6, the artist chooses to place a quote with a call from Skanderbeg for his brave men instead of a figural composition:

*"– As you saw. – said Skanderbeg. – not even the strongest of you could break the birches together. But one by one, John, who is still a child, broke them. And you, if you stay united, the enemy will not do anything to you. If you are separated, you will be defeated, no matter how strong you are. Therefore, my last message is this: «Always stay united, because even without me you will win. Albania has never lacked the brave! Swear!»*<sup>7</sup>. This scene, which conveys a strong unifying message, something that we see continue in the following scene no. 7, where Skanderbeg's brave men respond to him in unison "*– We swear!*", a gesture that symbolizes the continuation of the battle for freedom.

While in the second graphic novel titled: "*Skanderbeg and Ballabani*" (which is an adapted extension of the first novel "*The Last Order of Gjergj Kastrioti*" taken from the book by Mark Gurakuqi), the artist Gjinali focuses on one of his most famous opponents: *Ballaban Pasha, an Albanian turned servant of the Ottoman Empire as it is written in the introduction to the graphic novel:*

*"Ballaban was an Arab who betrayed his homeland. For this, the Sultan appointed him Pasha and gave him command of the Turkish army to fight against Skanderbeg. He was a wicked, cowardly and boastful man.*

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<sup>6</sup> Fatosi, Publication of the Organ of the Central Committee of the Bureau of the People's Republic of Albania, No. 1, (January 1968), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Right there.

*One day he was tempted to fight Skanderbeg in single combat. He hoped to cut off the brave man's head and send it as a gift to the Sultan. Then, honor, glory and endless wealth would await the traitor..."*<sup>8</sup>.

The narrative of this graphic novel unfolds as a classic drama with elements of moral conflict. Ballabani attempts to deceive Skanderbeg by sending him a letter asking him to surrender and join the empire in exchange for material favors. Skanderbeg, in an act of categorical refusal, calls Ballabani a "traitor" and declares him unfaithful to his homeland.

The clash culminates in open battle where the Albanian army under Skanderbeg's leadership achieves a magnificent victory, while Ballabani falls dead on the battlefield. The last scene no. 16 of this graphic novel concludes with a description that is written:

*"This is how Ballabani, the traitor to his homeland, suffered. He was broken and ashamed. His army, when it saw that its commander was defeated, fled in four pieces, routed by Skanderbeg's army. END"*<sup>9</sup>. An epilogue that reinforces the moral duality between patriot and traitor, always according to the indoctrinating principles of the Albanian communist regime.

### **1.1. Ideological and contextual analysis**

The creation of these two graphic novels by artist Dolli Gjinali, centered on the national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, should be seen not only as educational material, but also, above all, as an ideological instrument of the time. Albania in 1968 was at the height of its political self-isolation under the communist regime of Enver Hoxha<sup>10</sup>. In this context, historical figures like Skanderbeg were appropriated by the hermetic political possibility to serve as a symbol of resistance against imperialism, internal betrayal and foreign influences in the Albanian socialist society.

In these circumstances, the balancing and equalization of the myth of Skanderbeg with the "myth" of Enver Hoxha was implicit and dictated according to the line of the Party of Labor, causing the "cult of the individual" to reach utopian proportions for that time and even more so in the light of the contemporary present. Therefore, in this perspective, conducting a comparative ideological and contextual analysis of these two graphic novels helps us to highlight two essential elements:

1. Skanderbeg is presented as an ideologically pure figure, who remains loyal to his people, even at the moment of death;

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<sup>8</sup> Fatosi, Publication of the Organ of the Central Committee of the Bureau of the People's Republic of Albania, No. 1, (January 1968), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> O. Pearson, *Albania in the Twentieth Century, Vol. III: Albania after Tito, Stalin, and Hoxha*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2006, p. 158.

2. Ballabani represents the internal danger, which in reality had similarities with the figure of the “class enemy”, or “ballist”, which the communist regime often used to justify punishments and ideological purges.

For this reason, both graphic novels have two functions: an educational-historical function to form national consciousness in children and a political-propaganda function that aims to channel and dictate the values of resistance in accordance with the communist doctrine of the time<sup>11</sup>.

### **1.2. Artistic and stylistic values**

In terms of artistic analysis, the artist Dolli Gjinali has built the graphic novels with a simple, readable and emotionally direct style. The use of strong colors and clear contrasts helps to distinguish good from evil. The figures are typified: Skanderbeg with his long beard, goat-headed helmet, manly appearance – symbol of Albanian national pride is a classic heroic figure, the stereotype of his iconography in Albanian visual art, but also elsewhere. While Ballabani is presented with a cunning expression and stern appearance, which leads us back to the stereotyping of his portrayal, where such clichéd mimicry superimposes the symbolism of evil on the character.

The structure of the scenes is organized in a linear manner, following the stereotypical development of the event: introduction – conflict – climax – resolution. The scenes consist of texts placed in the form of boxes to explain the event and short dialogues placed inside the bubbles, which makes reading simple and understandable for children. The short dialogues convey meaningful messages and with a clear moralizing function, guiding the young reader towards socialist principles.

In terms of artistic style, they are realized with a clear, simple language and with a flat coloring, typical of educational graphic novels of the 60s in Albania. The black lines limiting the figures are clean and the colors are strong, almost by analogy with the spirit of the artistic style of Pop Art, with pronounced contrasts to distinguish the characters and events that take place within a scene and in the graphic novels themselves as a whole.

The graphic novels realized by Dolli Gjinali are a mixture of literary narrative for children, visual art and patriotic morality according to the principles of Albanian socialism. Artist Gjinali has masterfully brought a description that is both imaginary and real of the representation of the figure of Skanderbeg under the symbolism of the communist indoctrinating ideology. She has clothed him with the mantle of a hero of the communist

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<sup>11</sup> J. Pettifer, “Culture and Ideology under Hoxha,” in *Albania and the Balkans*, ed. Miranda Vickers, C. Hurst, London, 1999, p. 61.

present at that time rather than a true representation of what he is in the historiography of the Albanian nation. The narrative richness of the two graphic novels does not only testify to historical memory, but they are a reflection of the way in which the utopian Albanian communist regime of Enver Hoxha served and used national figures to strengthen the identity and political education of the new generation.

*"The Last Order of Gjergj Kastrioti"* represents one of the most successful examples of the use of the artistic genre of the graphic novel for indoctrinating and educational purposes in Albania during the years of communism. It combines visual narrative with ideological content to construct a simple but powerful model of the national hero and his adversary. Beyond its artistic function, this graphic novel remains a cultural document, just like *"Skënderbeg and Ballabani"*, which speaks to the way history and heroism were instrumentalized to shape the identity of younger generations in the service of a national and ideological narrative.

## **2. Enver Hoxha in the Albanian graphic novel: Building the cult of the individual**

During the communist dictatorship in Albania, the construction and consolidation of the cult of the individual around the figure of the dictator Enver Hoxha was a conscious ideological and propaganda project, which included all forms of communication with the public, including children's magazines such as "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri". In this context, the graphic novels published in the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri" played an important role in the early adoption of the figure of Enver as an undisputed leader, savior of the nation and an extraordinary man within children's literature.

The figure of Enver Hoxha was present with high frequency in Albanian graphic novels and illustrated stories of the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri" during the communist period. In contrast to the way historical figures were represented, Hoxha was presented as a versatile leader: wise, brave, loving with children, just and far-sighted<sup>12</sup>. He was depicted in two main forms: as a commander during the National Liberation War against the Nazi-fascist invaders and as the leader of socialist Albania in peacetime. This visual narrative is evidenced by the images published on the covers and inside the magazines "Fatosi" and "Yllkat" such as:

*"The First Violet"* written by Sandër Gera and illustrated by Agim Zajmi, "Fatosi", April 1968, p. 2, *"Uncle Enver is near us"* written by Tuni Papuçiu and illustrated by Spiro Kristo, "Fatosi", September 1968, p. 4 and *"Long live the mountains, uncle Enver!"* written by Hamdi Meça and illustrated by Llazar Taçi, "Yllkat", October 1974, p. 3.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History*, I.B. Tauris, London, 1999, p. 229.

In the scenes depicting the war, the young Enver was always on the front line, leading the partisans and inspiring the Albanian people who needed his irreplaceable presence, as in the stories: *“The First Meeting with the Commander”* written by Kastriot Zoraqi and illustrated by Spiro Kristo, “Fatosi”, October 1968, p. 3-5, *“The Happiest Partisan”* written by Nasho Jorgaqi and illustrated by Zef Shoshi, “Fatosi”, no. 1, January 1972, p. 4-6, *“Bullet in the Enemy’s Heart”* written by Odhise Grillo and illustrated by Zef Shoshi, “Fatosi”, July 1972, p. 4-5, *“Dorina”* written by Lulëzim Gazheli and illustrated by Zef Shoshi, “Yllkat”, March 1972, p. 5, *“Amaneti”* written by Odhise Grillo and illustrated by Petro Kokushta, “Yllkat”, May 1972, p. 3-7, *“Broken branch”* written by Odhise Grillo and illustrated by Zef Shoshi, “Yllkat”, March 1973, p. 2-4 and *“The Bravery of Albanian Pioneers”* taken from Comrade Enver Hoxha’s book *“For You Pioneers”* and illustrated by Fatmir Haxhiu, “Fatosi”, no. 20 (345), October 19, 1979, XXth Year of Publication, p. 1-4. In peaceful scenes, after 1945 he visited schools, met children and advised young pioneers on how to be worthy and defend the homeland. The iconography of Enver Hoxha is stereotyped by Albanian artists, as they always present him with a parental smile and a protective attitude.<sup>13</sup> Such iconography simultaneously reveals and creates the idealistic figure of the “great son of the people”, a representation that was deliberately used to build the cult of the individual that replaced the institutions and the very history of the Albanian people represented only by one individual, Enver Hoxha; *“LET’S EXPECT THE FOURTH CONGRESS OF THE P.P.SH. WITH AS MANY 4S AND 5S”*, “Fatosi”, September 1960, p. 1, *“Rare Joy”* written by Vettim Bejko and illustrated by Zef Shoshi, “Fatosi”, February 1972, p. 2 and the cover of the magazine “Yllkat” illustrated by Zef Shoshi, no. 11, November 1974.

Visually, the dictator Enver Hoxha was always presented clean, in a white suit or military uniform, in contrast to the enemies who had dark features and stiff and deformed faces. In some cases, he was placed side by side with mythical figures of history – including Skanderbeg himself, thus reinforcing the idea of the historical legacy that he represented and continued in the first person.

### **2.1. Narrative structure and mythologizing of the figure of Enver Hoxha**

In the graphic novels, Enver Hoxha was not simply presented as a political leader or a historical figure; he appeared as a mythical, almost supernatural character. The narrative structure in these illustrated narratives through graphic novels often depicted Enver as the leader of the people who stood in the face of darkness, internal and external enemies,

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<sup>13</sup> L. Ypi, *Free: Coming of Age at the End of History*, Penguin, London, 2021, p. 37.

leading the nation towards liberation and the light of socialism. His words had prophetic power, his decisions were infallible, and his presence in every scene carried an absolute moral and emotional authority, which we see on the cover of the magazine “Fatosi”, illustrated by Spiro Kristo, no. 10, October 1970.

In the graphic novels that illustrated stories that had as their subject the National Liberation War, he appeared at the center of the action, surrounded by devoted partisans, ready to sacrifice everything for his command. In narratives set in the post-war context, he is stereotyped by the graphic novel artists as a leader close to the people, especially children. These scenes were intended to create a sense of emotional connection and unconditional trust in his figure.

### ***2.2. Visual features and aesthetics of the “perfect” leader***

In terms of artistic approach, Enver Hoxha in the graphic novels always had a uniform and idealized appearance: calm appearance, regular features, clean clothing, with larger body dimensions than the others around him, generally dressed in a white suit or partisan uniform, with a humble but authoritative attitude. He never appeared tired, unsure or ambivalent. This visual idealization was intentional: Enver’s body was presented as the body of the “father of the nation”, whose figure was intended to convey security, protection and justice as in the story “*At the party*” written by Bekim Harxhi and illustrated by Llazar Taçi, “Yllkat”, no. 10 (209), October 1988, p. 1-2.

In some of the graphic novels he was surrounded by symbols of light (the sun, the flag, laughing children, pioneers with red scarves, etc.), while the enemies who were the “kulaks”, “imperialists”, “revisionists” and “ballists” were drawn with dark, deformed faces and threatening gestures as in “*Wall to Wall*” illustrated by Llazar Taçi, “Fatosi”, no. 6, June 1969, p. 4-5 and “*Mira, Lion and German*” illustrated by Agim Faja, “Fatosi”, no. 11, November 1969, pp. 7-9. This visual contrast reinforced the ideological dualism: Enver represented light, justice, the future; the others were darkness, failure, destruction, betrayal and the bad past.

### ***2.3. Dialogues and the language of the message***

Enver Hoxha’s words in children’s literature illustrated through the artistic genre of the graphic novel were laden with educational, commanding and sometimes pathetic tones. He often used sayings formulated in such a way that they would easily remain in the children’s memory and be repeated as ideological mantras, such as:

1. “The future is in the hands of the pioneers.”
2. “For you pioneers”
3. “Love for the homeland begins with love for the Party.”

#### 4. “The people love me, and I belong to the people.”

These phrases, repeated in various forms in stories, songs and various articles published within the magazines “Fatosi”, “Yllkat” and “Pionieri”, helped to instill a common language of glory and devotion to the “worldwide” leader, Enver Hoxha. It is enough to read the poem dedicated to him titled: “...*Love for our uncle Enver*” written by Tereza Marubi, “Yllkat”, February 1979, pp. 1-2.

#### **2.4. Illustration of the portrait of Enver Hoxha and the impact on the formation of young children**

The ultimate goal of these representations was not simply to make children recognize the figure of Enver Hoxha, but to build an emotional sensitivity and personal loyalty to him. In many stories, the child protagonists saw Enver as the central figure who guided them, gave them strength and confidence. He was for them more than a political leader. He was an ideal to be followed, a fatherly figure to be loved and a model to be imitated, e.g. “*LIFE LIKE THE MOUNTAINS OF UNCLE ENVER*” the cover of the magazine “Yllkat” illustrated by Spiro Kristo, no. 10, October 1973 and “*GLORY TO OUR TEACHERS*” the cover of the magazine “Pionieri” illustrated by Llambi Blido, no. 5/14, March 1980.

This process of cult acquisition through the graphic novel was particularly effective due to the visual nature of this artistic genre composed of colors, multi-figure compositions, the direct language with which it communicates with young readers, the narrative divided into many scenes, which stimulated the curiosity of children to read from one issue to another, from one graphic novel to another. All this was well thought out by the Hoxhaist regime due to the connection of children with the simplified forms of heroes and clear scenarios of good against evil. The messages that were passed repeatedly reinforced the ideological doctrine in an uninterrupted manner, instilling in the younger age groups more and more the image of the dictator Enver Hoxha as the “Father of the Nation” *par excellence*<sup>[1a]</sup><sup>14</sup>.

#### **2.5. The role of children and women in scenes with Enver Hoxha**

An interesting aspect is also the way in which children and women were visually depicted on the covers of children's magazines in relation to Enver: they always looked at him with admiration, respect and in many cases with

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<sup>14</sup> *Per antonomasia* [la] – is a term derived from the Latin language, but borrowed from the ancient Greek with the word: ἀντονομασία-excellent, unattainable, special. A term that consists of singling out/elevating a person on a pedestal for distinctive features compared to others, <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/antonomasia/>.

deep emotions (tears, hugs, ecstatic smiles, etc.) as we can see in the image on the cover of the magazine "Fatosi", no. 7 (308), April 5, 1978, Year of Publication XIX. This visual representation by the artists further reinforced the idea of "Enver as the protector of life" and as a source of peace and happiness in the Albanian socialist society. Moreover, the use of children in these illustrations served to convey the message that future generations would also be loyal to the political line of the Party of Labor of Albania led by the "immortal" Enver Hoxha, where on the covers of the magazines "Fatosi", no. 20 (321), October 19, 1978, XIX Year of Publication and "Pioneer", no. 19/14, October 1979, the extreme indoctrination towards the figure of the communist dictator is clearly visible, to the extent that the party was identified with his name "*ENVER PARTY*".

The figure of Enver Hoxha in the graphic novels and illustrations of the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pioneer" was essential in consolidating the cult of the individual in the early consciousness of Albanian children. Through a powerful combination of heroic narrative, idealized visual presentation, and simple yet memorable language for young age groups, communist propaganda created an almost sacred figure of the leader. This representation was not accidental, but a key element in the preparation of the "new socialist man." A citizen who worships the leader, obeys the Party, and serves the system without questioning its legitimacy.

### **3. The visual dialogue between Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and Enver Hoxha: Building an uninterrupted historical narrative through the education of myth and silence**

An interesting aspect of the representation of these two figures is the way they were linked in an unbroken historical line. In some cases, Skanderbeg and Enver appeared on the same page or in the same story as comparative figures: one who defended the country from the Ottoman invaders, the other who liberated Albania from the Nazis and was simultaneously building socialism according to the revolutionary principles of Marxism-Leninism<sup>15</sup>.

This narrative montage created a sense of continuity: Albanian history, according to this logic, had always had glorious leaders who had led the people towards freedom, placing Enver Hoxha at the ultimate pinnacle of this historical progress. In this way, Hoxha appropriated not only the historical narrative, but also the moral and emotional legitimacy of mythical figures such as Skanderbeg.

Children who grew up with the numerous scenes of graphic novels and illustrations published inside the magazines "Fatosi", "Yllkat" and "Pionieri" were formed in a reality where history served as an educational, but above

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<sup>15</sup> N. Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais*, Karthala, Paris, 2007, p. 319.

all manipulative tool. On the one hand, they were acquainted with historical figures such as Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, who represented a shining model of bravery, sacrifice and honesty in the function of the common (collective) good. On the other hand, they were unable to recognize the existence of figures like Mother Teresa (Gonzhe Bojaxhiu), who represented an ethical and human alternative opposed to the communist ideology and indoctrinating principles.

This conscious choice on the part of the Hoxha regime reinforced and deepened the division between “permitted history” and “forbidden history”, a phenomenon that had dramatic consequences on the cultural and identity consciousness of the generations raised during the communist dictatorship of the proletariat in Albania. Only after the fall of communism, when figures like Mother Teresa returned to the sensibility of Albanian society and in school textbooks, did a more comprehensive review of Albanian history become possible. Despite the absolute exclusion of the figure of Mother Teresa from her recognition through the graphic novel of Albanian artists during the Hoxha regime, her life journey was again described in visual and literary terms in the multi-page graphic novel published by Marvel Comics in 1984, entitled: *“Mother Teresa of Calcutta”*, with authors David Michelinie (writer), John Tartaglione (drawer and colorist), Joe Sinnott (colorist), Rick Parker (writer) and Roy Gasnick (historian), while Tom De Falco (editor) and Jim Shooter (editor-in-chief).

Through this representation of two figures, where Skanderbeg was truly part of the glorious past of the history of the Albanian nation and Enver was “invented” as a historical figure of his own present, Albanian children grew up in a cultural climate where history was not open to interpretation, but an educational tool focused and controlled by the ideology of the Party of Labor.

### **Conclusion**

The entire scientific research was based on the analysis of the presentation of the figure of the national hero of Albania, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, and the figure of the dictator Enver Hoxha. This research highlighted how these two figures became part of propaganda during the communist period in Albania 1945-1990. Both of these figures functioned as models of behavior, patriotism and obedience to authority in the visual narrative of graphic novels. Through heroic visual representations and simplified narratives, these figures significantly shaped the historical awareness and political identity of children of that time.

In conclusion, the representation of Skanderbeg and Enver Hoxha in graphic novels and illustrations of the children's magazines “Fatois”, “Yllkat” and “Pionieri” during the communist regime was not simply an

artistic act to recognize them through the genre of graphic novels, or illustration, but a pure act of political propaganda. Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg was reimagined as the ideological forerunner of the communist leadership, while Enver Hoxha was immortalized as the central figure of the new Albanian history.

Skanderbeg in fact became a symbol adapted to the Marxist narrative of class struggle and resistance to the “occupier”, in contrast to the figure of Mother Teresa, who was completely excluded from the Hoxhaist communist regime due to her proximity to religion and the West. These representations (and their lack thereof) are not simply aesthetic or editorial choices, but reflect a deeper structure of ideological control over the history and civic education of Albanians during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

These controlled narratives helped create a unified and dogmatic historical reality, where heroes represented not only the glory of the past, but also the legitimacy of the present. Through the analysis of these representations treated in visual and artistic terms by Albanian graphic novels, we can understand more deeply the way in which the regime used this extraordinary artistic genre for its power of communicative transmission to build not only a desired historical identity, but also a model of behavior suitable for the socialist “new man”.

Through this study, it is best understood how historical narrative can be used as an instrument for shaping the common consciousness of Albanian society at that time and how the censorship of silence can affect as much as the presence of a myth in the construction of a fragmented reality under the wild utopian pressure of a dictatorship like the Albanian one before the '90s.

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