

**BUILDING A TRULY ATHEISTIC STATE. A CASE OF ENVER HOXHA'S
ALBANIA**

By
LIANA SULEYMANOVA

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Supervisor: Professor Constantin Iordachi

Second Reader: Professor Matthias Riedl

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on Albania's building of the truly atheistic state. Due to its unique historical past, and especially its Ottoman heritage, an unusual degree of tolerance towards religions was born. Albania came to accept atheism as yet another religion. Moreover, as the research shows, Albanian atheism contained all features of a full-blown political religion.

In addition, traditionally shaped regional divisions into the conservative North Gheg and the "progressive" South Tosk communities influenced greatly the policies of Hoxha's Communist state regarding the treatment of various religious bodies. Albanian Catholic Church, the patron of the Northern part of Albania, which was considered to be backward tribal region by the Communist authorities, became the target of the government's severe persecution.

A large portion of the population, especially the youth came to accept atheism as their religion, while others continued practicing their traditional beliefs in secrecy.

*Dedicated to Eri for his patience and belief in me and to my family,
for everything.*

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Introduction

Communism came to Albania later, than to other countries. However, it managed to transform the country into “one of the most inflexible totalitarian edifices of the century.”¹ Indeed, many scholars argue that ever since the establishment of the Communist Party on 8 November 1941, Albania started a rapid process of transition from “a semi-feudal relic of the Ottoman Empire into an industrialized economy with the most tightly controlled society in Europe.”² Enver Hoxha played the most essential role in this process by imposing a regime, considered by many more totalitarian than the Stalinist rule in the Soviet Union; another example of such regime could be Ceaucescu’s Romania (1965-1989). Hoxha managed to convince the whole society of his almost divine nature (icon-like portraits in every house, office and building, his remarkable oratorical skills managing to keep the whole country listening, etc.) and became, alongside with Stalin, a true icon of socialism in the whole country through his vision of Albanian unity with some sort of “defensive nationalism.”³

One of the most fascinating features of communism in Albania is the state’s drive to build a truly atheistic state, as a part of Cultural Revolution campaign. Officially it started in 1967, when Albania declared itself to be “the first atheistic state.” However, many experts, among whom the popular writer, Leonard Veizi, argue that the movement against the religion started much earlier, he mentions events that took place in Durres before the official decree was published. He states that local high school “Naim Fransheri” in Durres started the

¹ Misha Glenny, *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta Books, 1999, p. 560.

² “History of Albania.” *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011. Web. 03 Jun. 2011.
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/12513/history-of-Albania>>.

³ Misha Glenny, *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta Books, 1999, p. 560.

campaign, which was then joined by other Albanian towns. Veizi also notes that Durres members of this movement sent a letter to Enver Hoxha, saying that they believe that religion does not go along with the ideals and principals of Marxism-Leninism and therefore should be abolished, as something backward and dangerous.⁴ Ramiz Alia, Enver Hoxha's successor, in his memoir *Une, Ramiz Alia* (I, Ramiz Alia) mentions that he was the first to read the letter sent from the school in Durres and at the beginning did not know how to react to their actions and demands, such as shutting down of religious establishments and eliminating of religious attributes, as well as their overall propaganda aiming at eradicating religion.⁵ However, since Hoxha found this initiative plausible and serving the purposes of building Socialism, the policy became endorsed statewide.

As Antonia Young, a freelance writer, anthropologist and an expert on Albania argues in her article on *Religion and Society in Present-Day Albania*, "In this age of religious prejudice and in view of the terrible policies of ethnic cleansing in its neighboring countries, Albania's religious climate remained remarkably tolerant."⁶ It somewhat echoes continuous debates that are being held on the subject of whether Albanians are religious people at all. Some historians argue that Albanians are not religious, due to centuries of occupiers imposing their own customs and traditions. One of the most prominent instances being the centuries of Ottoman rule, which turned a large number of population of the whole region into Muslims, a way for people to avoid high taxation. Others argue that Albanians have never been described as people particularly devoted to organized religion, although beliefs

⁴ Leonard Veizi. *Si u ngrit Propaganda kunder Besimeve fetare dhe shpallja e shtetit ateist shqiptar (Propaganda against religions and the declaration of Albanian atheist state)*. December 20, 2010.

<<http://www.forumikatolik.net/forum/showthread.php?t=3382&page=1>>.

⁵ Ramiz Alia (interview by Blerim Shala and Llukman Hallili). *Une, Ramiz Alia* (I, Ramiz Alia). Tirana: Teknoprint, 1993, p. 67.

⁶ Antonia Young. "Religion and Society in Present-Day Albania." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14 no. 1 (1999): p. 5.

and religions in one form or another have always been part of their lives, unlike their Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian neighbors who had national churches early in the state histories.⁷ While other historians quote Pashko Vasa's famous: "do not look at churches and mosques, as the religion of Albanians is Albanianism," and the case should be treated as unique.⁸ Antonia Young provides a remarkable example of Albania's national hero Skanderbeg "who was born an Orthodox, lived as a Muslim, and died Catholic."⁹ It is true that Albanian population changed their religious affiliations throughout the centuries, however it does not explain why atheism was welcomed if not with open hands, then with a certain degree of enthusiasm, especially by the younger population.

An extensive study, *Human rights in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania: a report of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee* mentions that according to "a 1938 census [...] Albania's religious composition prior to the present [Communist] government: sixty-nine percent of the population was Muslim, twenty-one percent was Orthodox Christian (including ethnic Greeks), and about ten percent was Roman Catholic."¹⁰ Moreover, this report also says, "the majority of Albanians tend not to be devoted to the organized religions. Turn-of-the-century travelers recorded that the remotest mountain tribes appeared to have resisted both Christianity and Islam and retained strong pagan traditions. Some theorized that those who did convert to Islam under Ottomans often did so for economic reasons and to escape discrimination."¹¹ It is clear from this report that prerequisites of tolerance towards changing policies in regards to religion existed in

⁷ Robert Elsie. *A Dictionary on Albanian Religion, Mythology and Folk Culture*. London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 2001, p. 125.

⁸ Young, p. 9.

⁹ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁰ Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, *Human rights in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania: a report of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Committee, 1990. p. 76.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 77.

Albanian society, which made it easier to implement the policy of state atheism. Instead of practicing the usual religious rituals Albanians became attracted to the “new religion”, Communism, which in its turn could not tolerate existence of any rivals to its undivided rule. Masses also took part in the anti-religious campaign: Albanian newspaper *Zeri i Popullit* (Voice of the People) of 1967 published letters from people from different corners of the country saying that they are ready to do whatever it takes to eradicate any signs of backwardness in the society: be it religious beliefs, traditional customs, illiteracy or treatment of women.¹²

My hypothesis is that in an unexpected way Albanians came to accept communism as yet another religion. However, unlike the religions before, atheism proved to have a more uniting feel to it, bringing people together alongside the lines of their national pride, other than differentiating them according to their religious beliefs. Atheism came to be considered as a way to excommunicate all the “foreign gods” from the country, and to unite the people as an Albanian nation believing into only one thing - the Albanian nation, under communism that is. Thus, as it will be argued in this study, atheism developed into the political religion, which did not tolerate any traditional religions. What followed was a massive campaign against religious establishments and a propaganda against the old beliefs and sentiments. The Albanian Catholic Church suffered the most and received a “special treatment,” as it provided the strongest resistance and was considered as the most dangerous to the regime.

Structurally this thesis is organized into four chapters. The first chapter is divided into three sections. The first part will be devoted to the religion in Albania prior to Communism and especially the importance of the Ottoman period in shaping the mentality of people. The

¹² Zeri I Popullit (Voice of the People). 1967. December 20, 2010. <<http://gazetajehona.com/zeri1967.html>>.

second section will deal primarily with the interpretation of atheism by Marxism-Leninism and implementation of it in the Soviet Union, which is essential as it is known that Enver Hoxha himself adored Stalin and tried to follow in his steps as closely as possible. And the third section will outline the methodology and sources used in this study. The second chapter will try to provide an insight into Albanian interpretation of atheism and it will be divided into two parts: the first one dealing with the official party line and documents concerning religion before 1967 and after, the second part explaining atheism in Albania as a political religion. The third chapter will focus on the relationship between the Communist authorities and the religious bodies and will be divided into three sections. The first part will describe Hoxha's opinion about the Muslim clergy and Orthodox Church. The second part will be dedicated to the case of Albanian Catholic Church. The third part will attempt to analyze the responses of the population to the measures taken by the government. The fourth chapter will provide essential concluding remarks on this study as a whole.

Chapter 1: Understanding Albanian Case

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part will address the issue of religious development of Albania prior to Communism, focusing mostly on the Ottoman period, as I consider it to be a crucial source of explanation of the policies of the Communist leadership towards certain religious communities that followed. The second section of the chapter will be devoted to the basic interpretation of Marxist-Leninist approach to religions in general; in this respect the question of implementation of state atheism policy in Soviet Union will be discussed in order to understand the uniqueness of existing pre-conditions in Albania prior to establishment of atheistic state. The focus of the third section is on the methodology and sources that were used in the following research.

1.1 Religion in Albania under Ottomans

Before the Communist takeover in 1944, religious composition of Albania was as it is now (approximately seventy percent of the population considered themselves to be Muslim, roughly twenty per cent Christian and ten percent Catholic), it stayed so after the Ottoman rule that lasted for nearly five centuries. Many experts argue that Albanians accepted Islam solely for the purpose of avoiding taxation, or for their own selfish reasons, and continued practicing Christianity in secret. However, the fact that years after the Ottomans were pushed out of the region, the Muslim religion stuck, proves the hypothesis that Albanian people came to accept Muslim religion as their faith. On the other hand, considering an unusual degree of religious tolerance among the Albanians, it is highly possible that many Albanians actually believed simultaneously in both Christianity and Islam, mixing the

customs and traditions of both faiths.¹³ As a matter of fact something called “crypto-Christianity” was a widespread phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire as a whole, and particularly in Albania. What is understood by crypto-Christianity here is publicly declaring adherence to Islam, while practicing Christianity in private. The witnesses state that these so-called crypto-Christians “publicly prayed to Muslim God aloud; in the heart, however they called on Mary and cursed Mohammed”.¹⁴ Most of the crypto-Christians were the newly converted to Islam Balkan peoples. As mentioned above, most of the conversions that took place in Albania were more or less a question of choice, at least at first. Moreover, “it was not obligatory for Christian Albanian lord to become a Moslim in order to preserve his feudal possessions as tilmars, although no doubt converts to Islam were favored by the Ottoman administration”.¹⁵ A lot of Albanians adapted to the situation by being both Christian and Muslim, there are known cases of the whole villages being crypto-Christian. One of the most known cases of Albanian crypto-Christians is the so-called Shpataraks, from the region near Elbasan. It is recorded, that the “governor of Elbasan, Jonus Effendi pressed the Shpataraks either to serve as soldiers in the Ottoman army, if they were Muslim, or pay taxes, if they still held that they were Christian. The Shpataraks thought that it would be better if they became Uniates (Greek Catholics), for then they might enjoy the protection of Austria-Hungary.”¹⁶ Therefore, some Albanians were going along with whatever religious affiliation was suitable at any given time.

One of the issues that apparently has a close connection with crypto-Christianity is the spread of Bektashism in the Balkans. Bektashi was a mystical order that formed a separate

¹³ Stavro Skendi. “Crypto-Christianity in the Balkan Area Under the Ottomans.” *Slavic Review*, No. 2, Vol. 26 (Jun., 1967): 227-246. JSTOR, p. 227. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/2492452.]

¹⁴ Skendi, p. 232.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 235.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 241.

branch of Shia Islam and was founded in Anatolia in the late thirteenth century, in the sixteenth century it became an official faith of Ottoman janissaries, elite corps in the standing army of the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ It also managed to reach the Balkan region, probably through the janissaries. The study done by Hasluck shows that the Bektashism was especially spread in the areas, which were known for their crypto-Christian beliefs.¹⁸ Among such regions are south part of Albania and the regions of Berat and Elbasan. What is intriguing about Bektashi order is that it has a number of features in common with Christianity, for example the cult of Christian saints. Therefore, Bektashi might have been seen as a link between Muslim and Christian religions, and one of the reasons for a large number of Albanians to turn to it. Moreover, many crypto-Christians secretly attended Bektashi gatherings and participated in rituals.

Thus, the topic of crypto-Christianity in Albanian territories raises many questions. As Stavri Skendi points out, one of the things that needs to be clarified when analyzing crypto-Christians is whether the people practicing it actually were “secret Christians” or was it just because after conversion, the certain traces of your old religion still remain. On the other hand, as mentioned previously, it could happen that the people actually believed in both religions simultaneously. Also, people could unconsciously become crypto-Christians out of simple superstition, “the Moslems’ belief that if their children were baptized by a Christian priest, they were protected from illnesses, or the belief [...] that a child given a Moslem name would be protected from evil” were common.¹⁹ Superstitions have always been a part of life of ordinary people, be it in Albania or anywhere else, and its influence should not be

¹⁷ “Albania-Albanians under Ottoman Rule.” [Mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com/history/albania/albania-albanians_under_ottoman_rule.html). Available from http://www.mongabay.com/history/albania/albania-albanians_under_ottoman_rule.html. Internet; accessed 17 April 2011

¹⁸ Skendi, Stavro, p. 244.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 246.

undermined. This is one of the reasons why Bektashism attracted such a large number of followers. Bektashism as a mystical movement appealed to the population specifically with its mysticism, but also for its availability and simplicity. Bektashism “emphasizes man as an individual. Women, unveiled, participate in Bektashi ceremonies on an equal basis, and the celebrants use wine despite the ban on alcohol in the Quran.”²⁰ The Bektashi religious leaders and its followers played major roles in the Albanian nationalist movement and as stated in many sources, may be to a degree reason “for the Albanians' traditional tolerance of religious differences”²¹.

It is true that the Albanians seem to be one of the most tolerant nations in the world in respect to religions. As Albanian historians, Stefanaq Pollo and Arben Puto argue:

Divided by two religions – Catholic and Orthodox since the eleventh century – then three, Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim since the fifteenth... Religions have arrived with occupying nations, who from West or East brought their own religions with them. From the start, such religions have been mixed up in politics and have always supported the invaders and been instruments of power over the people, and agents of division amongst them.²²

Moreover, despite the fact that religious picture of Albanian lands back in the Ottoman times was quite diverse and it remains so, there was never any civil conflict on Albanian lands on the basis of religious differences. People in Albania, even today, celebrate each other's religious holidays; the inter-religious marriages are quite common. This phenomenon is especially widespread in the areas that were traditionally regarded as crypto-Christian. Religion is a secondary characteristic for Albanians, what unites them is their sense of nationhood.

²⁰ “Albania-Albanians under Ottoman Rule.” [Mongabay.com](http://www.mongabay.com/history/albania/albanians_under_ottoman_rule.html). Available from http://www.mongabay.com/history/albania/albanians_under_ottoman_rule.html. Internet; accessed 17 April 2011.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Stefanaq Pollo and Arben Puto. *The History of Albania: From its Origins to the Present Day*, trans. Carol Wiseman and Ginnie Hole. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 281.

According to Nathalie Clayer, Albanian nationalism as a movement develops around the time of League of Prizren that took place in 1878; the League of Prizren was formed as a response to the treaty of San Stefano, which ignored completely the rights of Albanians to their territories: the Greater Bulgaria incorporated what is now the eastern Albanian lands, Montenegro received lands in the North.²³ At the League of Prizren, the leaders of Albanian lands came together in order to ask the Sultan to unite the *vilayets* of Monastir, Kosovo, Shkodër and Ioannina and to grant the unified Albania some degree of autonomy. However, the Sultan was against the integration of Albanian lands, although the League of 1878 was clearly pro-Ottoman. Not only did Albanians not think about the independence from the Ottomans, the League even set up a committee in Shkodër, the town near Montenegrin border, to support the existence of the Empire. Moreover, according to available sources, until very late in the history of the existence of Ottoman state, Albanian national consciousness seemed to be tied together with a larger commitment to Ottoman society.²⁴

Unlike in the case of their neighbors, Albanian nationalism did not develop around religion. As Barbara Jelavich points out, “religion, elsewhere the force of unity, here was a source of division.”²⁵ What actually boosted the nationalist sentiment was the Albanian language, the language that managed to fight its way through. In general, Albanian people living in the Empire were multilingual. Besides Albanian, most of them spoke Turkish, Greek and Slavic languages of neighboring territories. Nevertheless, it is crucial to point out the fact that until

²³ Nathalie Clayer. *Aux Origines du Nationalisme Albanais. La Naissance d’une Nation Majoritairement Musulmane en Europe*. Paris: Karthala, 2007, translated by Robert C. Ross, p. 1. [<https://chimoan.com/?p=202>]

²⁴ Gawrych, George. “Tolerant Dimensions of Cultural Pluralism in the Ottoman Empire: The Albanian Community, 1800-1912.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, No. 4, Vol. 15 (Nov., 1983): 519-536. JSTOR, p. 519. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/163560>.]

²⁵ Jelavich, Barbara. “Review of Stavro Skendi’s Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912.” *The Journal of Modern History*, No. 4, Vol. 40 (Dec., 1968): 684-685. JSTOR, p. 684. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1878551>.]

the late 19th century, Albanian language was not even codified; according to sources the language was written in more than five scripts. Even though in 1879, The Society for the Printing of Albanian Writings was founded in Istanbul, it was not until 1905 when the Bitola conference took place that the Latin alphabet was finally adopted.²⁶ Multilingualism and cultural exchange was generally encouraged in the Empire. It's not a coincidence that the famous Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, the Ottoman 19th century statesman, who was responsible for preparation of the civil code of the Ottoman Empire, the so-called *Mecelle*, stated: "The strength of the Ottoman state lay in its diverse cultural heritage."²⁷ For Cevdet Paşa, what truly defined the Osmanli millet (Ottoman nation) were the variety of languages and the mixture of customs, traditions and knowledge. If "cementing one's heart and soul to the homeland, however, involved for Albanians a continued loyalty to the multinational Ottoman Empire", ²⁸ then how did Albanians manage to turn from the most trusted comrades, private bodyguards, janissaries to the most hated and feared enemies? And if in 1878 Albanians were still faithful subjects of the Ottoman Empire, when and why did things begin to change?

At the Congress of Berlin, just like at San Stefano, the wishes of Albanians were largely ignored. Albanians sent a memorandum to the Congress, requesting for four *vilayets* (provinces) to be united under the Ottoman rule.²⁹ However, the request of the League was disregarded, Otto von Bismark was noted to have said, "Albanian nation simply did not and could not exist".³⁰ Thus, Albanians became drawn into four separate conflicts, including defending the territories awarded to Montenegro. Albanian 'people's army' defended the

²⁶ Nathalie Clayer, p. 2.

²⁷ Garwych, p. 523.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 526.

²⁹ Turku, Helga. *Isolationist States in an Interdependent World*. Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009, p. 63.

³⁰ Swire, Joseph. *Albania: The Rise of a Kingdom*. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1971, p. 3.

four districts successfully until 1880. The Montenegrins asked for the port of Ulquin in exchange for the four regions referring to the Treaty of San Stefano, the people's army once again defeated them. Montenegrins backed up by Austria-Hungary demanded that the Ottoman Empire would send the troops against Albanians, threatening that the Great Powers would otherwise occupy the Ottoman port of Smyrna (Izmir). The Ottomans sent their army to secure Montenegrins occupation of Ulquin. Albanians felt betrayed. One of the Albanian tribal leaders, Ali Paşa Gucija, was recorded saying: "Until this moment I had you [the Ottoman Sultan] in place of a father; but since you have separated me from you, yielding me to Montenegro, I have ceased to be yours any longer... Therefore, now that you have abandoned me and you don't have me with you any more, if you come to force me to submit to Montenegro, I will see myself as between two enemies who want to fight against me at any cost".³¹ Although Albanians were divided, not only to four vilayets, but also alongside the religious lines, they came to understanding that the unified state was the only thing that could save them from being "swallowed" by the neighboring states. Besides, no matter how divided they were, they had language and culture in common. Therefore, what they needed is not to erase the religious differences or to physically enforce the union of the lands, they needed the language that would strengthen their unbreakable national bond. Indeed, among Albanians there always existed the special tie to their land and nation that all Albanians inherited with the milk of their mothers.

The Albanian language was codified in 1905 at Bitola conference, despite the Ottomans protests. When Young Turks came to power in 1909, "they denied the existence of an Albanian nation, closed down schools, disarmed regions, appealed to Muslim unity instead of nationalistic Albanian unity, and tried to impose the Arabic alphabet", actions that made

³¹ Ivanović, Slobodan. *Iz istorije I kniževnosti*, Belgrade, 1931, p. 70, quoted in Glenny, Misha. *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta Books, 1999, p. 154.

the Albanians become furious.³² Revolt after revolt followed, which consequently led to Albanian state breaking away from the Ottoman Empire in November 1912, although in a much reduced form, plausible for the Great Powers, which played a big role in Albanian struggle for independence. Great Powers decided to back up Albanians this time essentially due to their fear that “all the territory annexed by Montenegro could eventually become a Russian access point to the Adriatic”.³³ This actually could happen, as Russia had a long-term ambition to gain the access to the “warm seas”.

Even though Albanians before the twentieth century were never properly unified under one leadership, there existed an *atdhedashuri* that would put them all on the same side. For a long time the only thing missing was a leader capable enough to make them forget about the fights with each other and unite them. What is meant by *atdhedashuri* (*At*-father, *dhe*-land *dashuri*-love) is the love, the bond with your land, your national identity. *Atdhedashuri* was always present among the Albanian lands, no matter how divided they were, even when the Christian boys were taken as part of *devşirme* practice, their parents before saying the last farewells, told them to obey and learn from the Ottomans, but to never forget that they are Albanian above all. Therefore, it seems that the so-called Albanian National Awakening cannot be bound solely to the League of Prizren and the 19th century nationalist movements. The sentiment was there from the beginning, another question is that neither the state, nor the nation ever existed and ever was united before the attempts that came as a result of the League.

Another issue that has to be mentioned with regard to the development of religion in Albania prior to Communist take-over is the existence of the so-called local communities in Albania. This is an important topic, as the existing traditional division into the North and

³² Glenny, Misha. *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta Books, 1999, p. 154.

³³ Ibid, p. 63.

the South becoming apparent during Ottoman times will later on influence the Communist politics towards different religious groups. Isa Blumi, an assistant professor at New York University and an expert on Modern Balkan history presented a curious argument. In an article titled *the Politics of Culture and Power: The Roots of Hoxha's Postwar State*, published in *East European Quarterly* in 1997, Isa Blumi argues that the roots of Hoxha's uncompromising position with respect to Catholics can be found in the historical rivalry between Tosks and Ghegs, two tribal groups of Albanian peoples roughly representing the South of Albania and the North respectively, divided by the Shkumbini River. According to Blumi, "Ghegs throughout the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires autonomously ruled their territories with fierce principles and strong tribal codes. [...] Catholic Church, in particular, played instrumental role in preserving this distinctive cultural and organizational entity throughout both the Ottoman and the interwar periods".³⁴ This division, although slightly less noticeable nowadays, still serves as the main distinguishing element between Albanian people, as the South considered to be more flexible and open to changes, while North is conventionally regarded as conservative and traditional. As Blumi points out:

Tosks flourished from its exposure to the outside world. Exposed to both the East and West from their vulnerable lowland villages, the effects of Albania's tumultuous and multi-ethnic past have created a distinct cultural entity among Tosks that tends to maintain an international outlook. Well connected with the Albanian diaspora in the West and influenced by external religious elements – the Orthodox Church and Bektashi sect – that stressed a commercial and external identification, Tosks had a fundamentally different social history and consequently, different socio-political aspirations than Ghegs.³⁵

Therefore, traditionally the Northern part of Albania was considered to be the Catholic. In addition the North was also always known for its adherence to somewhat tribal traditions. One of such traditions was *gjakmarrje*, the custom of blood vendetta, based on the idea of

³⁴ Isa Blumi. "The Politics of Culture and Power: The Roots of Hoxha's Postwar State." *East European Quarterly* XXXI, no. 3 (September 1997): p. 379-398, p. 381.

³⁵ Ibid.

pledge of honor, *besa*.³⁶ The tradition that even though was borrowed from Montenegrins, became so deeply enrooted in Albanian culture of the North, that it is still practiced by some today. According to the 1918 account taken from British government publication on Albania: “Custom demands that the male relatives of the murdered person should exact vengeance either on the murderer himself or upon any of his male relatives – even down to the boy of three years of age... The most heinous offense of all is the murder of a guest friend and this never admits of any judicial or peaceful settlement. At the present day the blood feud still rages among the Albanian mountains like a pestilence. Not only the individuals, but the whole tribes are involved.”³⁷ *Gjakmarrje* became so closely associated with Albania, that not many remember that it was originated in the mountains of Montenegro, rather than Albania and nowadays when people think of blood vendetta, they think of an ill-reputed Albanian mountain custom. This sort of tribalism became later on considered as backward by the Communist authorities and therefore it was supposed to be fought against. Furthermore tribalism in combination with Catholic beliefs came to be considered quite dangerous and regressive by the Communist leadership.

1.2 Marxism-Leninism and Religion

In order to analyze the phenomenon of atheism in Communist Albania it is essential to start with the question of what atheism actually meant for communists and why it became closely associated with the ideology, as well as to describe the implementation of this policy in the Soviet Union and the obstacles that the leadership of the Soviet Union encountered

³⁶ Misha Glenny. *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta Books, 1999, p. 152.

³⁷ N. P. Jopson. “A Survey of Albanian Studies.” *The Slavonic Review*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (December, 1924): 412-418. JSTOR, p. 417. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4201865>.]

while trying to apply atheist ideology or more precisely scientific atheism on the population of the state.

According to Karl Marx, “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”³⁸ Devoted communists, such as Vladimir Lenin, followed Marx’s understanding of religion, taking it even further by criticizing the whole existence and necessity of religion as such. Marx’s saying, “religion is the opium of the people”, became one of the cornerstones of Lenin’s ideology. According to Lenin, “All modern religions and churches, all and of every kind of religious organizations are always considered by Marxism as the organs of bourgeois reaction, used for the protection of the exploitation and the stupefaction of the working class.”³⁹ It should not be overlooked however that destruction of the religion was not the first priority for Lenin, “he repeatedly stated that it was highly necessary to have people support Communist policies and work for their objectives, even though these followers had not shaken off their religious prejudices and superstitions.”⁴⁰ He clearly understood that especially for peasants, the traditional way of life, the so-called *uklad*, bore enormous significance, and religion without a doubt played a huge role in it.

Nevertheless, when talking about atheism in the Soviet Union, it is necessary to provide specific Marxist-Leninist interpretation, instead of taking Marx’s and Lenin’s understanding separately. As Józef Maria Bocheński, a Polish Dominican, logician and philosopher explained in a curious article on the subject of Marxism-Leninism and Religion, “To believe that a cursory reading of Karl Marx suffices to understand the Marxist-Leninist

³⁸ Schoenfeld, Eugen. “Marx, Karl.” *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society*. Hartford Institute for Religion Research, Hartford Seminary. [online] <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/Marx.htm>.

³⁹ Lenin, V.I. “About the attitude of the working party toward the religion”. *Collected Works*. Vol. 17, p. 41. [online] <http://www.psylib.ukrweb.net/books/maenl01/txt17>

⁴⁰ Curtiss, John Shelton. “Religion as a Soviet Social Problem.” *Social Problems*. No. 4, Vol. 7 (1960): 328-339. JSTOR. [online] <http://www.jstor.org/stable/799329>, p. 328.

attitude towards religion is, to say the least, a rather childish assumption.”⁴¹ Indeed, when talking about communist ideological unacceptance of religions and in connection to that implementation of atheist measures in the Soviet Union, it is essential to analyze this phenomenon specifically through a prism of Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism combined, provides the manual and the explanation of unnecessary and even harm that religions bring.

Firstly, the brief definition of Marxism-Leninism would be as follows, it is in itself a type of faith, moreover it is not just a social doctrine, it is also a metaphysical world-view and last, but not least, “it is said to be an application of the more general laws of dialectical materialism to society and history”.⁴² Even taken not as a social doctrine, but an ideology, it seems that Marxism-Leninism positions itself as an occurrence undoubtedly sharing a large number of common features with the existing religions: it has followers-believers, it has leaders that become “gods” and carry out almost a messianic mission, let us keep in mind here that Lenin’s mausoleum that was built in 1924, right after Lenin’s death, was constructed so as to keep Lenin’s body on display for public to be able to pay respects to the great *vozhd*. This fact elevates Lenin to the level of somewhat a saint and people visiting the tomb as pilgrims.

Furthermore, other features can be traced in the basic ideas of dialectical materialism.

According to Bochenski’s interpretation, dialectical materialism states:

The world is the only reality; there is no other world above or alongside nature and, consequently, there is no God, no absolute spirit. This unique world is *infinite* in several respects. It is, first, infinite in space (properly infinite, not only unlimited). Second, it is infinite in time, i.e. has no beginning and no end. Moreover, it is

⁴¹ Bochenski, J. M. *Marxism-Leninism and Religion*, ed. by Bociurkiw, Bohdan in *Religion and Atheism in the USSR and Eastern Europe*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975, p. 2

⁴² Bochenski, p.4

infinite in profundity (depth) meaning that it contains within itself a virtual infinity of 'forms of movement', i.e. forms of being up to consciousness.⁴³

Since life exists only in the present world and this world is endless, there is no need for afterlife, Judgment Day, heaven and hell. Every person lives and is controlled by his own consciousness. Moreover, "all spiritual phenomena of a society, i.e. the social consciousness, depend upon and ultimately determined by the economic life of the same society".⁴⁴ Man can become truly happy only when he is doing good for the society he lives in, every person has a task in hand to ensure progress at the given moment of time.

Having said all that, according to Marxist-Leninist understanding, "religion is a false, obsolete science; second, it is an equally false metaphysics; and third, it preaches false moral values".⁴⁵ Religion does not let people be happy on this Earth; there is always a promise of future happiness in the world beyond, which people should strive for. Moreover, most of the religious teachings describe mystical magical events that are very hard to prove to have actually occurred; nevertheless they claim to be true and should be regarded as such. Lastly, as it is pointed out in the noted above article by Bochenski, "above all, religion does not attribute to man his primacy since it admits a God and higher beings. It is this not humanistic, but anti-humanistic".⁴⁶ Indeed, a man deprived from a mission to serve the community cares solely of his own need and becomes egoistic in his strivings, while being a servant or even a slave of God.

Talking about the slave-master relationship, consistent with Marxism-Leninism is a belief that "religion is the superstructure of society in which there is exploitation".⁴⁷ It is crucial to bring up Marx's quote that 'religion is the opium of the people' once again, because it

⁴³ Bochenski, p. 6

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 7

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 8

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.9

highlights the significance of the exploitation topic. Religion serves as a drug, a tranquilizer to keep people calm, it also keeps people from rebelling against the system, “Why make a revolution if life is short and happiness awaits us beyond the grave?”⁴⁸ Consequently, if there is no exploitation in the society, there will be no need for religions, as the main function of religions – to ensure the submissiveness of the masses would have no room to be carried out.

Marx did not go beyond the fact that religions are socially harmful phenomena, Lenin on the other hand realized just how significant this topic is and especially in the setting of post-Revolutionary Soviet Russia. With a clear aim in his head did he open a number of academic institutions headed by the Institute of ‘Scientific Atheism’, ensured the publication of specialized literature, the organization of numerous conferences and distribution of articles dealing with the subject of religion and atheism. Sometimes, Marxism-Leninism is regarded purely as a social doctrine and its intolerance of religions is explained by simply highlighting the following relationship-chain: “the clergy is linked to the exploiters, to the capitalists; therefore, the clergy and religion must be combated”.⁴⁹ However, it is not just anti-clerical, anti-establishment as a whole, it is primarily anti-religious, against any sentiments that the people may carry.

In the Soviet Union undoubtedly the strongest sentiments coming from the populations were towards the Russian Orthodox Church, although the significance of other religious groups should not be undermined. Nevertheless, as far as the Russian Orthodox Church was concerned, ever since the October Revolution, it “had had severe difficulties with authorities”.⁵⁰ While Lenin was in power, there was an open conflict, almost until his death. Then there was a brief period of compromise, which was followed by the merciless terror

⁴⁸ Bochenski

⁴⁹ Bochenski, p. 12

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 39

under Stalin. During the Second World War however, the Soviet leadership decided to turn to the Church to insure people's mobilization, which will be discussed further later in the paper. After the death of Stalin and Khrushchev's coming to power, the relationship between state and the church deteriorated again, the atheist propaganda started again. However the results of Khrushchev's campaign were quite poor. As quoted in Bochenski's article:

Insults, violence and the forcible closure of churches not only fail to reduce the number of believers; such measures even tend to increase their number, to make clandestine religious groups more widespread and to antagonize believers against the State.⁵¹

To summarize the features of the Soviet Union's case, the explanation given by Steven Merritt Miner, in his book *Stalin's Holy War. Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945*, is noteworthy. The author states that the Soviet history was based on the struggle against the historical legacy of tsarist Russia, Stalin used religion as a tool to control the masses, considering this technique as "countermanipulation of manipulators"⁵² and what followed was not so much the revival of the Russian Orthodox Church, but an unexpected revival of religion,⁵³ as a response to anti-religious actions of the state. Paul Froese, an assistant professor of Sociology at Baylor University, makes an interesting observation: "Their [Communist] obsession with atheism led them to pay too much attention to God. In the end, they would have been better off leaving God alone and working with the religious culture they were given."⁵⁴ Indeed, the close attention that Soviet authorities paid to the subject of religion and their change of heart in the course of Soviet

⁵¹ Bochenski, p.41

⁵² Miner, Steven Merritt. *Stalin's Holy War. Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003, p. 317.

⁵³ Miner, p. 319.

⁵⁴ Froese, Paul. *The Plot to Kill God. Findings from the Soviet Experiment in Secularization*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2008, p. 198.

history made people become much more interested and attracted by traditional religions as means to find their identity.

1.3 Methodology and Sources

Unlike in the Soviet Union, in Albania for instance, the Communist leadership managed to proclaim an atheist state in 1967, and to make over half of the population actually believe in atheism. However, what makes the Albanian case different is the fact that different from the Soviet Union, Albania did not have such a strong religious tradition. After five hundred years of Ottoman occupation, about seventy per cent of the population ended up being Muslim for the purpose of avoiding the heavy taxation, which the *reaya*, or the non-Muslim residents of the Empire were otherwise subject to or otherwise as means of social mobility. Therefore, Albanians never managed to establish the strong bond with their respectful religious affiliations, instead having the love for their nation and/or land as the main characteristic. Vasa's quote mentioned earlier defines the Albanians very precisely. Albanians are very tolerant people, when it comes to religions, because most of them manage to follow every single one of them and to incorporate those beliefs in their every day life. Building an atheist state in Albania was possible due to this unusual degree of religious tolerance, this more social role that religion had in Albania prior to Communist take-over, such a strong institution as the Russian Orthodox Church was lacking, thus making it possible specifically in Albania and nowhere else, to actually implement the idea of godless society.

In order to understand whether people coming from different religious and social background accepted the "conversion" into atheism with much resistance or not, a series of interviews was conducted. The oral sources would also help me to establish whether it was the movement constructed from above or widely supported by the population. My

preliminary research showed, that although there was some resistance and people did practice religion secretly at their homes, much of the population took up the initiative with surprising enthusiasm.

There is a number of sources that will be used in this paper. In terms of primary sources, it will be party documents, excerpts from Enver Hoxha's memoirs, oral interviews. Oral interviews that were conducted had an initial set of questions to the respondents:

What religious background did you come from?
 How old were you when Albania was proclaimed an atheist state?
 What was your job?
 What do you remember about the anti-religious campaign launched by Hoxha's government?
 What is your religious affiliation now?
 What is your party affiliation at the moment?

In addition to primary sources, the articles issued by foreign historians and experts in the field of atheism and religion will be used to provide examples of responses from the outside world. With regard to the secondary sources, a large amount of literature has been published on the subject, many authors writing about the Communist Albania devote a chapter or two to the Cultural Revolution and Atheist State making. Nevertheless, as far as this specific topic goes, I find most of the sources insufficient. A report of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee on violation of human rights in Albania provides an extensive statistical survey of the situation in Communist Albania, which I will be using extensively. Nevertheless, this report is mostly filled with dry facts and recommendations in the fields of human rights and religion and does not provide much analysis and interpretation. In terms of methodological literature, I will be using Jiping Zuo's *Political Religion: The Case of Cultural Revolution in China*, which provides a solid starting point to analyze the Albanian atheism as a political religion. Among the primary sources, the book of Gjon Sinishta, *The Fulfilled Promise*, providing an extensive study on the subject of the relationship between Communist government and the Albanian Catholic Church, is

especially noteworthy. It contains the information on the numbers of persecuted/ executed Catholic clergymen. Another piece of literature that will be used in this paper is the memoirs of Father Giacomo Gardin, Catholic priest persecuted in Albania, which provides alongside the oral testimonies, valuable insight into the life under the regime. Additional source I find notable is a working paper published by Puebla institute, Roman Catholic Human Rights group in 1989, *Albania: Religion in a Fortress State*, written by a free-lance journalist Janice Broun. It provides valuable chronological analysis of implementation of atheist ideology in Albania, with the main focus on persecutions of members of clergy that took place during various periods of Hoxha's rule. Lastly, books by such experts on Albania as Miranda Vickers, Peter Prifti, Arshi Pipa to name a few will be used to highlight different aspects of atheist state making in Albania.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention that the topic, which is researched in this thesis, is an intriguing one, but at the same time a difficult one to document. The sources available are scarce; even in terms of the secondary literature, the information is often incomplete. Nevertheless, using the combination of two, I believe I was able to paint a comprehensive picture of the aspects of atheist state-making in Albania.

Chapter 2: Albanian Understanding of Atheism

The following chapter is dedicated to the question of Albanian interpretation of the policy of state atheism and the ways in which the Party decided to implement it. The chapter will be divided into two sections. The first one will be dealing primarily with the official party position on the question of religion. A number of primary sources, such as party documents and modifications made to the Constitution inherited from King Zog will be examined. The second part will be devoted to exploring how Hoxha managed to transform atheism into a form of political religion and whether he was successful at it.

2.1 The Official Party Stance on Religion Before and After 1967

According to the statistical data available from 1937, the religious distribution of Albania was as follows: roughly seventy per cent of the population was Muslim (including about two hundred thousand Bektashi members adding up to twenty per cent of pre-war population of Albania), another twenty per cent Orthodox and about ten per cent Catholic.⁵⁵ Unofficial conflict between Church and the State started during World War II,⁵⁶ when many clergymen were seen as spies for enemy-powers. Nevertheless, this conflict did not result in modification of any formal documents, although it stirred up some trouble, especially with the Communist take-over, when clergymen became suspected of engaging in counter-revolutionary activity and organizing anti-government opposition groups, such as ‘Albanian Unity’ and ‘Catholic Action’.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Stavro Skendi (ed.), *Albania*. New York: Praeger, 1956, p. 287-291.

⁵⁶ Halusi Hako. *Akuzojme fene* (We Accuse Religion). Tirana, 1968, p. 80.

⁵⁷ Prifti 1975, p. 389.

Although there were certain confrontations with the Church concerning the question of ‘reactionary’ clergymen engaged in traitorous activity,⁵⁸ in terms of struggle on paper, the anti-religious movement did not come as a result of a carefully calculated and thought through plan. For instance, the Proclamation of the *General Council of the National Liberation Army Directed to Albanian People During the Creation of the General Staff*, which was issued on July 10, 1943, defined the National Liberation Army of Albania as “an organization, in which the participation is insured regardless of religion, place of origin or party affiliation. Its doors are open to all those who really want to fight the foreign enemy”.⁵⁹ The National Liberation Army of Albania was an important institution, as it consisted of everyone who would later on become part of the ruling communist elite of the country, including the young and ambitious devoted Communist Enver Hoxha. It is clear that in 1943, at the time the document was issued, only a year before the Communists acquired complete power,⁶⁰ religion was not an issue on the political agenda, Hoxha and his circle not only had little interest in the issue of religion, but focused instead on the plan to take-over the leadership of the state. Quite possibly, at the time they had no idea of the Marxist-Leninist stance on religion. Isa Blumi describes: “[Hoxha] publicly embraced the association with respective religious leaders by reportedly joining in collective prayer in Tirana the day the capital was liberated from the Nazis”.⁶¹ Moreover, considering this event it seems that the Communists, including Hoxha, initially did not had such strong feelings

⁵⁸ Prifti 1975, p. 389.

⁵⁹ Translated from Albanian by Ervis Sulejmani. Document No.3. AQSH. F. 41 dos. 166. Archive of the National Television.

⁶⁰ Note: Communists came to power in November 1944. Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee. *Human rights in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania: a report of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Committee, 1990, p. 79.

⁶¹ Edwin E. Jacques. *The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Period to the Present*. London: MacFarland and Co. Ltd., 1995, p.432, quoted in Isa Blumi. “The Politics of Culture and Power: The Roots of Hoxha’s Postwar State.” *East European Quarterly* XXXI, no. 3 (September 1997): p. 379-398, p. 384.

regarding the subject of religion. There are doubts, whether Hoxha himself ever even read Marx, as Arshi Pipa points out in his book, *Albanian Stalinism: Ideo-Political Aspects*,

Has he [Hoxha] read Marx previously? Probably not. Nor did he, as it seems, read him later. His minimal references to him [Marx] in his ‘theoretical’ works are those of a freshman first exposed to an Introduction to Marxism course. It would seem that Hoxha is the kind of “Marxist intellectual” who has not read Marx. And we grant that he read him in his old age, when began to dabble in Marxist-Leninist theory, he certainly would not and could not understand him.⁶²

How did this person become the leader of what was to be the most closed communist society in the world without reading Marx is hard to tell. Nevertheless, it makes one wonder whether Hoxha’s awaked interest in eradicating religions in Albania was caused by the ideological reasons or he had something entirely different in mind.

Right before Communists came to power, an official document published on 23 October 1944, as part of the *Declaration of the Anti-fascist Council for National Freedom of Albania*, stressed that in order to build a human society based on freedom and dignity, certain rights must be guaranteed, such as equal rights in front of the law to all Albanian citizens, freedom of religion and thought, as well as the equal rights to all religions, etc.⁶³ Article 18 of the 1944 Albanian Constitution, also stated that: “All citizens are guaranteed freedom of opinion and belief... All religious communities are free in matters concerned with their faith as well as in its practice and outward expression.”⁶⁴ Although in the official documents, discrimination against religions was not an option, the party documents however clearly stated their relationship towards religious establishments:

The Party of Labor of Albania has always waged a systematic struggle against religion as an ideology of the exploiting classes hostile to socialism and opium of

⁶² Arshi Pipa. *Albanian Stalinism: Ideo-Political Aspects*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 131.

⁶³ Translated by Ervis Sulejmani. Document No. 52. Plasari, Ndreci. *Politike Antikombetare E Enver Hoxhes. Plenumi e 2 KQ te PKSH. Documente*. Tirana: Eurorilindja, 1996, p. 329

⁶⁴ James S. O’Donnel. *Coming of Age: Albania Under Enver Hoxha*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 137.

the people. The Party has considered the struggle against religion, against religious prejudices, against backward customs directly or indirectly linked with religion, as essential for the social liberation of the working people, for their ideological revolutionary tempering and for the construction of socialist society.⁶⁵

Religion was associated with something uncivilized, dragging the state and society down. The regional division of Albania into Gheg North and Tosk South was the definition of the struggle of backward versus progressive, if such terms can be applied in this case. Nevertheless, although North indeed represented the traditional, custom-based community, it had a leader in the face of Albanian Catholic Church, which by no means was uncivilized or uneducated, on the contrary – powerful and intelligent. This issue however will be discussed in more details in the chapter on Albanian Catholic Church and its relationship with Communist authorities.

More actions followed with implementation in August 1945 of Agrarian Reform law, which “deprived the religious institutions of nearly all their property,”⁶⁶ which triggered an outcry from the clergy, who obviously did not want to lose their estates. The relationship of the government with Albanian Catholic Church worsened following its refusal to cut ties with Vatican and to become an autocephalous institution. As a consequence of this decision, in 1946 the Jesuit order was banned and in 1947 the Franciscans followed.⁶⁷ The struggle reached its peak, when primarily due to the counter-actions of the Albanian Catholic Church, in January 1949, the Decree No. 743 was passed according to which every religious body had “to disassociate itself from any foreign overseeing body.”⁶⁸ Every religious body of Albania had to remain national. Clergy responded by bringing up the Constitution, while

⁶⁵ Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania. *History of the Party of Labor of Albania*, 2nd ed. Tirana: 8 Nentori Publishing House, 1982, p. 435.

⁶⁶ Prifti 1975, p. 389.

⁶⁷ O'Donnell, p. 140.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

government decided to remove any criminal penalties guaranteeing the freedom of religion from the Criminal Code.⁶⁹

The mêlée reached its climax, when nearly two decades later, in his speech of February 6 1967, Hoxha proclaimed Albania first atheist state in the world and major changes were made in the state's legislature concerning religion. Before that notable speech, the attitude of the Party was simple:

[...] the Party and the state did not prohibit religious beliefs, the presence of religious communities, or the performance of religious rites. [...] The Party could not insult the feelings of a mass of working people, especially in the countryside, who were closely linked with the Party and the people's power, but continued to believe in one or the other religion, although they did not display any exaggerated fanaticism. The eradication of the religious outlook would come as a result of convincing the masses ideologically.⁷⁰

However, events that occurred after the speech could not be seen anymore as just an underground struggle against the probable enemies of the state and the propaganda against the backward traditions. Decisions made by Hoxha's government immediately after 1967 were a part of clear-cut centralized and massive anti-religious campaign, that had a direct affect on the Albanian legislature. For examples, in November 1967 the *Decree No. 4337* was passed, which "officially canceled the legal status of religion," which was stated in the Constitution of 1946. Therefore, religious institutions lost all their legal rights in Albania.

The most fundamental can be considered the passing of *Article 37* of the Albanian Constitution of 1976, which in turn stipulated, "The State recognizes *no religion*, and supports and develops atheistic propaganda in order to implant a scientific materialistic world outlook in people."⁷¹ Among other essential additions to the legal documents at the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies, p. 437.

⁷¹ Anderson, Bjorn. "The Constitution of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania. Approved by the People's Assembly on December 28, 1976 ." *BA Publishing*.

time is *Article 55*, which stated: “The formation of any organization of a Fascist, anti-democratic, *religious*, or anti-Socialist nature is forbidden. Fascist, *religious* or anti-Socialist activity and propaganda are forbidden, as is the incitement to hatred between people and races,”⁷² and the Penal code of 1977, which imposed prison sentences of three to ten years for “religious propaganda [...], as well as the preparation, dissemination or possession for dissemination of literature of such content.”⁷³ Hoxha’s government took upon itself not only the task of eradicating any signs of what was considered to be religious backwardness, but also the task to undermine the significance that these institutions held. As Anton Logoreci, a well-known anti-Communist, journalist and a writer⁷⁴ states in *The Albanians: Europe’s Forgotten Survivors*: “This extinction of religious life exemplified the regime’s unwillingness to tolerate the existence of extraneous institutions of any kind, however weak, obedient or subservient they might be.”⁷⁵ This quote once again stresses the argument that the struggle against religions was not as much of an ideological nature, but of a more pragmatic one: it was a power struggle.

A new *Decree No. 5339* was passed in September 1975, which largely aimed at Albanians with Christian names, stipulating that “citizens who have inappropriate names and offensive surnames from a political, ideological, and moral standpoint are obliged to change them.”⁷⁶ The government went even further by publishing the official *Dictionary of People’s*

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, *Human rights in the People’s Socialist Republic of Albania: A Report of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Committee, 1990. p. 86.

⁷⁴ Note: In 1993, Albania awarded Logoreci the medal “Pishtar i Demokracise (Torchbearer of Democracy),” for his wartime effort to show people what democracy meant through his broadcasts as head of BBC’s Overseas Service.

⁷⁵ Anton Logoreci. *The Albanians: Europe’s Forgotten Survivors*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1977, p.155.

⁷⁶ Minnesota, p. 86.

Names in 1982, listing about three thousand appropriate ‘national’ names.⁷⁷ Among such names were Ylli (star), Gezim (joy), Agim (dawn), Bashkim (unity), Besnik (faithful), Flamur (flag), Ilir (coming from Illyria), Arber (middle ages name for Albanians), Alban (from the name of the country), Marenglen (telescoped Marx, Engels, Lenin). Many children born at that time were named after the leader of Albanians – Enver. It was also declared by the *Decree No. 225*, that towns and villages with religious names must be renamed. For example, the village of Shenkoll (St. Nicholas) changed its name to Ylli I Kuq (The Red Star), the Greek town of Agios Nikolaos (St. Nicholas) was changed into Drita (Light) and Stalingrads appeared on the map of Albania.⁷⁸ It is hard to tell whether the population of Albania picked up this initiative or not, as it is known that many for instance carried one public name and kept another name (e.g. of religious or foreign origin) for the use at home, at least in the beginning when the decree was issued. As more time passed people got accustomed to using the ‘approved’ names, which were supposed to highlight their belonging to the Albanian nation. Once again, this policy on the names mostly targeted the Christian and Catholic names, Muslim names were tolerated to a large extent.⁷⁹

Hoxha's ruthless fight against religion was successful in eliminating formal worship “in November 1967, the Albanian literary monthly *Nendori* announced that 2,169 religious buildings had been closed.”⁸⁰ Nevertheless, some Albanians continued following their religious beliefs, even if that meant putting themselves into great danger. According to the Penal Code any individuals caught with religious literature, attributes, or other religious objects faced long-term imprisonment. Weddings performed in religious manner were

⁷⁷ O'Donnel, p. 144.

⁷⁸ Minnesota, p. 89.

⁷⁹ Note: If Muslim names were also banned, Hoxha himself would have to be the first one to change his name, as it means ‘Islamic clergyman’.

⁸⁰ Finngeir, Hiorth. "Albania: An Atheist State?" *George Fox University*. http://www.georgefox.edu/academics/undergrad/departments/soc-swk/ree/Hiorth_Albania.html. Internet; accessed 3 December 2010.

forbidden; the compulsory shaving of beards was implemented. Due to the widespread spying network, conducted by citizens themselves, religion was practiced in secrecy. Many cases are known of how officials tried to uncover people practicing religious rites. For instance, during Ramadan and Lent authorities would give away certain food products, such as meat or dairy, that were prohibited by religious canons, in order to expose the believers.⁸¹ Furthermore, this opened a possibility for education to become the responsibility of the state, the way to teach new generations the value of communism and atheism:

In order to liberate people from religious beliefs and backward customs, the Party carried on extensive atheist-scientific propaganda work by means of the radio and the press, books, lectures and talks, films, etc. By disseminating culture, education and scientific knowledge, the school played a major role in this direction.⁸²

Hoxha's atheist propaganda was especially effective regarding the school system, as Albania had a youthful population and the average age of the Albanian population in 1985 was only twenty-six years old. The strategy started to show results especially with children who were young in 1967 and who did their schooling after the mosques and churches were closed already. This part of the population was a target group for yet another aim of Hoxha's propaganda: children denouncing their parents for practicing religion. Children responded with enthusiasm, Peter Rama who belonged to Annunciation Orthodox Church in Tirana said in 1992: "We were afraid to tell our children that secretly we continued to pray... We feared they might talk about it outside."⁸³ The new generation of Albanians was grown up to be right who Hoxha wanted them to be: obedient of the state, aware of their national belonging, but unreligious to the point of being atheist.

⁸¹O'Donnel, p. 141.

⁸² Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies, p. 436-437.

⁸³ Henry Kamm. "Albania's Clerics Lead a Rebirth." New York Times, 27 March 1992, p. A3. [online] <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/27/world/albania-s-clerics-lead-a-rebirth.html?pagewanted=2&src=pm>

Later on in his speech in 1982, more than a decade after the anti-religion campaign started, Hoxha said, “As for religion, you need not to worry about it. To believe or not to believe is a personal right, a question of conscience, and not an institutional question: religion cannot be imposed according to the desire or will of the Hoxhas, the Bishops, or the Pope of Rome”.⁸⁴ Moreover, in the same speech Hoxha noted: “our state is atheistic by the will of its people, ” thus stressing the fact that it was a conscious choice of Albanian population to become atheistic.⁸⁵ Whether it was a conscious choice or not is not worth arguing, as different people in Albania had different opinion. Younger generation were brought up in this tradition and did not know better, the older people who believed in Hoxha, more than in God, probably consciously thought, that “disappearance of religion is not so bad because it helped in the [growth of] unity of the people and... [it happened] not with force, everybody did it voluntarily.”⁸⁶ While those affected by the campaign directly, had negative reaction, blaming Hoxha for “imprisonment of their spirit”.⁸⁷

Nonetheless, Hoxha managed to put the whole country into a state of total submissiveness by means of both his ruthless and adamant repressive polices and through his powerful social skills. Till his last day he stayed loyal to his aim of building a truly socialist state, and made sure that Albanian politics would strictly follow the needed path. It has to be noted that, his dedication caused not only the total isolation of Albania from the rest of the world, but also “put little Albania on the map-as one of the world’s leading danger spots.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, *Human rights in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania: a report of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Committee, 1990. p. 86.

⁸⁵ Minnesota, p. 96.

⁸⁶ Results of the questionnaires given in Albania, March and April, 1994, quoted in O’ Donnel, p. 143.

⁸⁷ Kamm, p. A3.

Moreover, this was a proof that the ideals of communism do not have to become extinct and they can be kept alive for many years, does not matter at what costs. More than two decades passed since Hoxha's death, but his name and his legacy is still in the hearts of some people. It can be illustrated by the following example. On one of the mountains in the south of Albania, there was once Hoxha's name painted in red across the mountaintop. After the democratic government came to power, all the remains of communism had to be erased, including this inscription. Nevertheless, every morning the letters would appear again painted by the dedicated Communists trying to keep the legacy alive. As Misha Glenny points out, "the dictator had, after all, succeeded in making Albania a truly independent country – no mean achievement for a small state whose modern history was replete with examples of domination, perpetual insults, and repeated attempts at dismemberment of the more powerful neighbors."⁸⁹

As it was highlighted in this section, the anti-religious campaign, which started as an underground struggle against the old order, was based both on ideological and political/pragmatic reasons. The Communist leadership felt that after the years of being under the foreign influence, it is time for Albania to break itself free from the chains of external pressures. They saw religious institutions, in particular the Catholic Church, as the main source of spreading the enemy's ideology. Therefore, the authorities thought it to be the best solution to nationalize the religious bodies of Albania. Once again, it mostly targeted the Catholic Church, as Orthodox Church became autocephalous from Athens and Constantinople in the late 1920s. Once the clergymen refused to consider the proposal,

⁸⁸ Harry Hamm. *Albania: Where Stalin Still Rules*. Saturday Evening Post. Vol. 235 Issue 11, March 1962. Accessed on December 20, 2010.

<<https://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdf?vid=14&hid=109&sid=f8a4db9b-668f-4a08-91ff-66cd424b51c1%40sessionmgr108>>.

⁸⁹ Misha Glenny, *The Balkans 1804-1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta Books, 1999, p. 569.

more active actions followed that resulted in the total abolishment of religion in Albania, as well as eradicating any religious ‘left-overs’ in the society, such as names of the geographical locations, family names, and the destruction or re-purposing of religious buildings. Some people secretly continued practicing their religion, while others became affected by the government propaganda, which became especially heavy in the field of educating the youth.

2.2 Atheism in Albania as Political Religion

As mentioned previously in the methodology section, in order to explain whether atheism in Albania became transformed into political religion or not, the analogous study done by Jiping Zuo, professor in the University of Nebraska-Lincoln on the subject of Cultural Revolution in China will be used as the foundation. Although there were a lot of similarities in the way the topic of religion was handled both in China and Albania, nevertheless atheism in Albania managed to transform itself into political religion, while in China an attempt to destroy traditional religion led to the development of political religion with the cult of personality of Mao, who basically became God. Therefore, China never managed to achieve atheism, while Albania with its particular history and past, managed to turn atheism into a feature of political religion.

In Albania, destruction of traditional religion encouraged the development of the new type of religion around the figure of a party leader-Enver Hoxha. It is essential to note that Hoxha was of Bektashi origin; therefore he came from a background of mystical religiosity and unrestrained love for his country, which was taught to him since young age. While reading Hoxha’s *Reflections on the Middle East*, written in the form of a political diary, one cannot help but notice how much respect and admiration did Hoxha hold for Prophet Mohammed, “while being a preacher of the Koranic law, Mohammed, at the same time,

was also ‘head of state’”.⁹⁰ Hoxha himself, as Arshi Pipa suggests, became haunted by the idea of projecting Mohammed’s image on himself, as the founder and the prophet of a new religion Albanian atheism.⁹¹ Indeed, in a short time Hoxha managed to transform his own image into an icon and started to be regarded not God-like, but as a prophet, with a clear messianic mission to save his country and his people. Hoxha wanted to make his capital some sort of Mecca of Marxism-Leninism.⁹² Hoxha became fascinated by this new possibility of accumulation of power and started the direct destruction of religion to make space for the new one – atheism. There were quite a number of similarities between Hoxha’s atheism and traditional religions, national songs sounded like religious hymns, praising Hoxha the Savior, which had lines of such content: “I first heard those five dear letters at the dawn of my life. Ever since, your name became as dear to me as my paternal home, as precious as socialism...”⁹³ Nevertheless, unlike in the case of China, Hoxha did not become the idol for Albanian people, but just a person who could transmit a message and to teach people what was socialism and why was it necessary to achieve it.

Hoxha managed to turn atheism in Albania into political religion. Christel Lane, Economic Sociology, a Senior Research Associate of the Centre for Business Research of Cambridge, among others lists such features of political religion, as eternal conflict with ‘church’ religion, as well as points out that political religion demands the devotion from all participants.⁹⁴ Moreover, as Zuo suggests,

⁹⁰ Enver Hoxha. *Reflections on the Middle East*. Tirana: The “8 Nentori” Publishing House, 1984, p. 483.

⁹¹ Arshi Pipa. *Albanian Stalinism*, p. 141.

⁹² Pipa, p. 195.

⁹³ Quoted in Peter R. Prifti, *Socialist Albania Since 1944: Domestic and Foreign Developments*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978, p. 182. For the full text of the Sulejman Mato’s poem, check Appendix 3.

⁹⁴ Christel Lane. *The Rites of Rules*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, used in Jiping Zuo. “Political Religion: The Case of the Cultural Revolution in China”. *Sociological Analysis* No.52, Vol.1, (1991), p. 105.

Political religion claims authority not only over political affairs but over all aspects of social life. The Cultural Revolution did not focus on the the political movement alone, but extended its power and influence over a broad area of culture, education, economy, family, and even personal life-style. Individuals were required to be completely loyal to the greater collective society.⁹⁵

Albanian case included all of these features. Moreover, the political religion substituted conventional religions, but the traditions themselves remained. For example, the old religious ceremonies were replaced with new secular festivals, such as: national holidays – Albanian Independence Day (November 28), Liberation Anniversary (November 29), workers’ holidays – Builders’ Day, Miners’ Day, Printers’ Day; various agricultural festivals – harvesting of grapes, olives; celebrations in honor of heroes of labor and others.⁹⁶

Therefore, it can be seen that in the case of Albania, Party’s search for ways to unify the nation resulted in the creation of political religion on the basis of Albanian understanding of atheism. Moreover, it can be said that Hoxha, among all other Communist leaders, came closest to achieving what Marx described as atheism, although the final goal was never reached. Undoubtedly, Hoxha’s attempt to ‘convert’ people to atheism was not done purely out of ideological reasons, as Zuo suggest, “political leaders used rituals as a tool to enhance their power because religion and ritual tend to hide the true source of power from those over whom it is exercised”.⁹⁷ Thus, Hoxha used this new religion to stabilize his own position and to promote his own image. Moreover, the development of such religion was only possible because of the prior relationship that existed between state and church in Albania.

⁹⁵ Zuo, p. 105.

⁹⁶ Prifti 1975, p. 401.

⁹⁷ Emily Martin Adhern. *Chinese Ritual and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, mentioned in Zuo, p. 109.

Chapter 3: Relationship of Communist Government with Religious Establishments

This chapter talks about the issue of relationship the Communist leadership had with respective religious establishments. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part will deal with the Orthodox Church and the Muslim clergy, which according to the sources available was less affected by the anti-religious campaign. The second part will be dedicated to the Communist attitude towards Albanian Catholic Church. The part dealing with the Catholic Church will in its turn be subdivided into two sections: one - on the question of possible reasons behind the actions of the government and the other one will analyze the case-studies of the actual Catholic clergy members who became maltreated by the regime in power. Lastly, the third section of the chapter will be dedicated to the responses of the population and will attempt to answer the question of whether the common people supported the government in its strive to eliminate the Church as an establishment. This section will be based on two interviews conducted in March 2011, which provide a noteworthy insight into the Communist past.

3.1 Treatment of Orthodox Church and the Muslim Clergy

The treatment of the Orthodox Church and the Muslim religious body by the Communist government differed greatly from the one the Albanian Catholic Church had received. In April 1989, Janice Broun, a free-lance journalist writing frequently on religious believers in Eastern Europe in cooperation with the Puebla Institute, a lay Roman Catholic human rights group, published a report on religion in Albania, which states:

Between 1945 and 1951, the Communist Party began executing its policy of religious repression. This anti-religious campaign, more severe than in any other Eastern bloc country, consisted of three strategies: toleration, within limits, of Islam; co-option of the Orthodox Church as an instrument for mobilizing its members

behind the Communist government's policies; and *the total elimination of the Catholic Church*.⁹⁸

Thus, the Catholic Church was seen as the most dangerous enemy to the regime, an obstacle that needed to be destroyed in order to proceed on the road towards the ideal communist state. Due to the information available, analyzing and interpreting the existing relationship between Albanian Catholics and the Communist center is a task that is possible to undertake. However, as far as the treatment of Islamic and Orthodox clergymen is concerned, there is a serious lack of information on whether any of them were actually seriously persecuted against, at least in terms of harsh prison sentences and executions. Undoubtedly, the land reform of 1945, which not only made it possible for the State to confiscate the property from religious institutions, but also to shut down religious printing presses and educational establishments, affected both Muslim and Orthodox clergy.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, although Janice Broun lists the names of Muslim and Orthodox clergymen who were executed or otherwise killed for religious beliefs, she does not provide the proof of the information, instead citing Albanian Catholic Information Center as the source. Therefore, for the purpose of this section and due to the inability to verify provided in the report information, material concerning the Albanian Muslim and Orthodox clergy persecuted during Hoxha's anti-religious campaign will be disregarded.

Nevertheless, a few remarks should be made with regard to relationship of the Albanian Communist Government with Islamic authorities and Albanian Orthodox Church. Hoxha chose the policy of divide and rule with regard to the Muslims, by recognizing the Bektashi sect, as a separate religious body from the Sunnis. As Broun notes, "the Bektashis were initially given favorable treatment and two Bektashi leaders, Baba Faja and Baba Fejzo,

⁹⁸ Janice Broun. *Albania. Religion in a Fortress State*. Washington, D.C.: the Puebla Institute, Inc., 1989.

⁹⁹ Broun, p. 13.

were permitted to be elected deputies of the People's Assembly in 1945".¹⁰⁰ Most probably Hoxha's favoritism towards Bektashis came not only from the fact that his family was of a Bektashi background, but also because over the centuries Bektashism came to be considered more Albanian, than other religions present in the state. Since most of the people responsible for Albanian National Awakening of late 19th - early 20th century were also of Bektashi upbringing, it became associated with Albanian national resistance. It is a well-known fact that Hoxha used various nation-building myths well to gain the respect of the population and to ensure the support of needed groups of population. In this case, he used the promotion of Bektashi followers as heroes of Albanian National Awakening, to gain the approval of the Bektashi community. It is necessary to point out that Bektashism in general became very much connected with Albania and became a sort of unofficial Albanian religion, already in the early 20th century, already in 1929 Antonio Baldacci, geographer and a Balkan enthusiast, mentioned in his book on Albania, that "Bektashism is clearly defined within Albanian religion – strictly speaking it is neither Muslim, nor Christian. It represent a denomination which adapts itself easily to the national and patriarchal sentiments of the Albanian race, and to the traditions and customs of the local population".¹⁰¹ Nonetheless already in 1947, Hoxha's attitude changed, most probably due to his better acquaintance with the Marxist-Leninist doctrine. However, it is significant to mention, "Compliant leaders were used by the State to demonstrate to the Muslim world how Communism and Islam could co-exist peacefully".¹⁰² Hoxha stated in 1982: "The

¹⁰⁰ Broun, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ Antonio Baldacci. *Albania*. Roma: Unione Editrice, 1929, p. 300-01.

¹⁰² Broun, p. 14. Note: that is of course before the official proclamation of 1967, after which Albanian Communist State shut itself close from the influence and opinion of the outside world.

hierarchy of the Muslim faith was weak, without the least experience to give us trouble [...] The rites had been abandoned [...] and were practiced only because they ‘existed’.”¹⁰³

With regard to the Albanian Orthodox Church, the situation was slightly different. Looking to win the support of the Orthodox Church and “to use it as a tool to mobilize the Orthodox population behind its policies,” a large number of Orthodox establishments were infiltrated by a network of spies and loyal to Communist ideals subjects of the states.¹⁰⁴ Virtually the whole Orthodox Church hierarchy became replaced by pro-Communists, such as Paisi Vodica, who became the head of Albanian Orthodox Church in 1958.¹⁰⁵ Albanization of Orthodox Church happened already in the 1920s, and autocephaly was granted to it in 1937 by Constantinople.¹⁰⁶ Therefore the Albanian Orthodox Church became independent from any external control even before Communists came to power. Thus, by being Albanian, although including a Greek-speaking minority, it did not present the threat to Hoxha’s regime.

3.2 Communist Leadership and Catholic Church in Albania

Although Catholics believers in Albania comprised barely ten per cent of population, before Communists came to power, the Albanian Catholic clergy proved to be the most resistant among the established churches to the regime’s anti-religious policies. Evidence exists that

¹⁰³ Enver Hoxha’s remarks on the 40th Anniversary of the Conference of Peza in 1982, translated and reprinted in III Albanian Catholic Bulletin 23, 24 (No. 1, 2, 1982).

¹⁰⁴ Broun, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Note: Paisi Vodica was married, thus he was canonically ineligible to become a bishop, nevertheless he was chosen due to being a pro-Communist militant, thus regarded as “reliable” subject.

¹⁰⁶ Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee. *Human rights in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania: a report of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Committee, 1990, p. 76, footnote 2.

Albanian Catholics started being targeted much earlier than the official proclamation of the atheist state, according to the sources that will be examined further in this chapter, ever since late 1940s Catholic clergy started being systematically and persistently persecuted against. This section will be devoted to exploring the possible reasons behind the government's "special treatment" of the Catholic Church, as well as analyzing the significance of Catholic clergymen's struggle against the Communist establishment, while the next section will examine more closely the cases of Catholic clergymen who were executed for their beliefs.¹⁰⁷

3.2.1 Albanian Catholics – "A Special Case"

Albanian Catholic clergy became subject to different treatment, than the one received by their Orthodox and Muslim counterparts. In May 1945 a meeting was held between Enver Hoxha and Archbishops Gasper Thaci and Vincenz Prendushi, during which Hoxha demanded that the Albanian Catholic Church would separate from Vatican and become a national church, supporting the regime.¹⁰⁸ Both Archbishops refused. A wave of arrests followed, Albanian Catholic Church being immediately treated as "fascist servants," and "collaborators".¹⁰⁹ The propaganda machine of the Communist regime worked hard to promote the image of Catholics as enemies of the state after not being able to use them as a "channel for communist indoctrination".¹¹⁰ There are several reasons behind Albanian government's harsh actions against Albanian Catholic clergy. First of all, it did maintain strong ties with the Vatican, at a time when Italy was considered a fascist enemy. Secondly,

¹⁰⁷ Information on the number and names of the executed members of clergy taken from Gjon Sinishta. *The Fulfilled Promise. A Documentary Account of Religious Persecution in Albania*. Santa Clara, CA: H&F Composing Service-Printing, 1976, leader of Albanian Catholics in the United States, who personally collected data and account of first-hand experiences and established the trustworthiness of the sources.

¹⁰⁸ Broun, p. 16.

¹⁰⁹ Sinishta, p. 126.

¹¹⁰ Sinishta, p. 60.

the Catholic clergy was highly cultured, having received their education in various schools all over the world, including seminaries in Italy, thus being a powerful rival for the minds of the people. People were attracted by well-dressed, well-spoken Catholic priests and sought advice from them; often these people were not even Catholic themselves. In certain small villages, especially in the North, Catholic Church was as much a place of worship, as it was of culture, socializing and education.

Albanian leadership did not fear the Muslim clergy as much for instance, as it seemed much more malleable and adaptable to the circumstances. The communist government knew that most of the Muslim believers and members of clergy did not even know Arabic and therefore could read only selected verses from the Quran, which were previously translated into Albanian. Can you truly be a faithful believer in a certain religion if a holy book – Quran is not translated into your own language?¹¹¹ The Bible on the contrary was translated much earlier, and the translation, as well as various interpretations was available to Albanian general public for many decades. Most of the Muslim people learned verses and prayers by heart without understanding them, therefore according to the Party's view; these people could be manipulated to believe into something else. Thus, anti-religious war in Albania started first as the war targeting solely religious establishments. Nevertheless, after facing much resistance from Catholic Church and their parish, the authorities understood that it was not only the religious institutions they had to fight, but also people's sentiments enrooted deep in their hearts, their sense of belonging to certain communities. Hoxha even admitted:

¹¹¹ Note: A complete translation of the Qur'an into Albanian language was first published in Prishtina in 1985 by Feti Mehdiu. He is an expert of Islamic studies and Arabic language in the Philological Faculty of Prishtina. Information taken from Ramiz Zekaj, *The Development of the Islamic Culture Among Albanian During the XXth Century*. Tirana: The Albanian Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1997, p. 178.

It is wrong to maintain that religion means church, mosque, priest, hoxha (a Muslim priest), icons, etc., and that if these disappear then automatically religion and its influence on the people will also disappear. We must be realists. The struggle against habits, traditions, old norms and against religious viewpoints, which are deeply rooted in the course of centuries in the conscience of the people, has not yet come to an end. This is a long, complicated and difficult struggle.¹¹²

Hoxha obviously knew that eradicating the traditional sentiments will not be an easy task, therefore he put a lot of time and effort into a propaganda machine that would eliminate the old customs, habits, traditions, religious ties.

Earlier in the chapter when analyzing relationship between Hoxha and Orthodox and Muslim clergy, the comment was made that regarding these two groups, Hoxha was trying to find solution to let them co-exist within the regime. Isa Blumi stresses that Hoxha had strong personal relationships with both Muslim and Orthodox clergy, especially the Southern one.¹¹³ An example of two religious figures – Bishop Fan Noli and Bektashi Baba Faja Martanesh is given. Bishop Noli was publicly recruited to join the regime after the war, while Baba Faja became Vice Prime Minister of the Republic.¹¹⁴

Isa Blumi was also quoted earlier with regards to traditional division of Albania into conservative Catholic North and flexible South influencing the Communist actions towards various religious groups. This is a crucial issue to discuss. The Catholic North due to its tribalism was considered to be backward and dangerous. The Gheg North was seen as a combination of two evils. The first one was its strong bond with religious institution, Catholic Church, which in its turn had a strong tie with Italy, an enemy-state. The second evil was the fact that the North was backward and Ghegs in general had a strong adherence to old traditions and norms, which made them generally inflexible.

¹¹² Albania Claims: “First Atheist State in the World.” *Radio Free Europe Research*. October 9, 1967. Budapest: Open Society Archives. Box-Folder-Report: 2-5-40.

¹¹³ Sinishta, p. 384.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

I tend to agree with Blumi. Since Hoxha considered North and consequently the Gheg community as backward and since he made it his mission to become the second Scanderbeg and to homogenize the population, eliminating the Gheg identity and in this respect the Gheg dialect of Albanian language, “to tear down the barriers, separating Ghegs and Tosks”¹¹⁵ became quite an important task. However, since the community had a strong patron, in the face of Catholic Church, it became a much more difficult goal to achieve. Persecuting the members of Catholic clergy became the way to show the Gheg population who is the superior, “bishops were forced to clean streets and public bathrooms and wear clown outfits with paper signs across their chests reading: ‘I have sinned against the people’.”¹¹⁶ It is noteworthy, that Enver Hoxha himself appropriately came from the Tosk community, being born in the southern town of Gjirokaster and was able to use Tosk population to help him to fight against the Ghegs, however later on after acquiring much power and under the pressure coming from Moscow, it became necessary “to show the place” to other religious groups as well. This was yet another reason for treating the Catholics differently from other religious groups.

3.2.2 “As Your Martyrs Resist in the Faith...”

It is necessary to reconstruct the actions that the Albanian Communist government took with regard to the Albanian Catholic Church. Right after the meeting between Hoxha and Archbishops Thaci and Prendushi, the position and status of Albanian Catholic clergy worsened. Both Thaci and Prendushi were arrested. According to Janice Broun, “Thaci died one year later at the hands of the Sigurimi while under house arrest, and Prendushi perished

¹¹⁵ Blumi, p. 385.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 389.

in a hard labor camp in 1949”.¹¹⁷ The similar fate awaited other members of clergy unwilling to cooperate, for instance, Apostolic Delegate Fran Gjini, who tried to find a compromise between the Communist government and the Catholic Church was arrested for spreading anti-government propaganda; after a year’s imprisonment, he was executed on March 8, 1949.¹¹⁸ Franciscan and Jesuit orders were also banned. Non-Albanian clergymen also faced persecution:

A few months later, members of different religious orders who were not Albanian citizens but had resided in Albania for many years working in different religious and social institutions were expelled from the country after a detention of six months in a prison camp under the most inhumane circumstances.¹¹⁹

Everybody was under suspicion, even the people that performed the undercover missions for Albanian government, as well as government officials. In this respect two cases are the most noteworthy. The first one is the public trial of Lieutenant Kchira, broadcasted through Radio Shkodra. Kchira was an ex-member of the secret police, who was “accused and brought to trial for his intimate affiliations with the Catholic clergy”.¹²⁰ His last words were:

You commanded me to go, at night to hide arms in the churches and monasteries, so you would have a pretext to eliminate the clergy and to destroy the Catholic Church. I confess to the entire Albanian people that I have carried out your orders with great diligence and secrecy. But, because, you have no consideration for me. I demand that these facts be made known to the Albanian people. My personal disgrace is not important to me. Instead, I detest having been a vile instrument in your hands and of having betrayed the blood of so many innocent members of the Catholic clergy.¹²¹

The person who made this confession was also responsible for the crimes committed by the Albanian Communist authorities, and who until the Party turned its back on him, actually shared their views. Lieutenant Kchira’s statement shows, that even people who knew that

¹¹⁷ Broun, p. 16.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Sinishta, p. 51.

¹²⁰ Sinishta, p. 53.

¹²¹ *Fides*. Rome, March 1953, No. 291, p. 6. A documentary international bulletin published in Vatican. Quoted in Gjon Sinishta. *The Fulfilled Promise. A Documentary Account of Religious Persecution in Albania*. Santa Clara, CA: H&F Composing Service-Printing, 1976, p. 53.

Catholic clergy did not collaborate with the enemy against the Albanian state still supported their government, be it out of fear or out of knowledge and belief into Marxist-Leninist doctrine.

Lieutenant Kchira actually committed certain crimes, and was executed and “his corpse was thrown in the same grave in which he had buried bodies of many innocent priests,”¹²² the second case’s circumstances are slightly different, although the accusation of being intimately affiliated with the Catholic clergy also followed. In 1949, after the relationship with Yugoslavia deteriorated, Albanian government made what seemed to be an attempt to establish some kind of peace with the Catholic Church. Tuk Jakova, Minister of the Interior and Secretary of the Cadres of the Albanian Communist Party, who also happened to be the only Communist in the leadership of the state coming from Catholic background, initiated the dialogue with the other side. Jakova argued that Yugoslavs initiated all religious persecutions and that the new period in the Church-State relations had begun. Indeed, some of the anti-Catholic actions had been performed by joint Albanian-Communist police forces; nevertheless the anti-religious propaganda was coming from Tirana and not from Belgrade.

In January 1949 the decree No. 743 “On Religious Communities” was passed, which demanded the organizational charter from all religious communities, which “would be in harmony with the existing state constitution”.¹²³ Albanian Catholics were not being able to achieve consensus with the Party, the government broke off the negotiations. Moreover, Tuk Jakova was charged with collaboration with the enemy¹²⁴, helping the Catholics, and was sentenced to twenty-five years. Jakova died on his way to prison. The two cases

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Sinishta, p. 55.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

mentioned above could not be different from each other; however they both pointed out the fact that no one was safe, not even people working for the government.

Among clergymen who were executed for their beliefs is Bishop Gjini, arrested after the government received his public letter that denounced the campaign produced by Communists. It is proven that Bishop Gjini underwent terrible tortures and was executed without a trial in March 1948. Many such cases followed, overall according to Sinishta, by the end of 1946 at least twenty Catholic priests were executed and more than forty were imprisoned and the numbers only grew.¹²⁵ Catholic Church was severely mutilated by the regime, causing some clergymen to exile, while imprisoning and/or executing others.¹²⁶

3.3 Responses of the Population and Members of the Clergy

I shall start this section with an anecdote I have discovered in Arshi Pipa's book *Albanian Stalinism: Ideo-Political Aspects*, which presents a collection of political essays on the topic:

At some point there were in the Central Committee, besides Hoxha (Albanian 'hoxha' has the same sound and meaning as its English counterpart 'hodja')¹²⁷ and Shehu ('sheh' or 'sheik' in English) and their wives, people such as Mihal Prifti ('prift', an Orthodox priest), Manush Myftiu ('mufti,' Muslim religious head of district), and Haxhi Lleshi ('hadji' is one who has made a pilgrimage to Mecca). An Italian comrade who happened to be in Tirana was curious to know whether names such as these had a meaning. And when an Albanian comrade explained to him what they mean, he is reported to have exclaimed: "*La santa famiglia!*"¹²⁸

A variety of measures described above were undertaken in order to pursue the goal of eliminating religion mostly by means of state-organized repression, directed at all religious institutions and religious officials, preventing them from exercising their functions. Ever since November 1944, when Communists – Albanian Party of Labor came into power, led by Hoxha, members of clergy gradually came to be considered as class enemies and were

¹²⁵ Sinishta, p. 51.

¹²⁶ Note: for more cases of executed Catholic clergy members, see Appendix 2.

¹²⁷ Hoxha as the son of mullah and Shehu as the son of sheh.

¹²⁸ Arshi Pipa. *Albanian Stalinism*, p. 91.

treated as such. Moreover, as Father Giacomo Gardin, an Italian-born Jesuit who survived a decade of incarceration in Albania, claimed in his book *Banishing God in Albania: The Prison Memoirs of Giacomo Gardin* describing Hoxha's atheist state building, every kind of religion was persecuted, be it Orthodox, Muslim or Catholic Christianity. Catholic Church became considered one of the most threatening to the regime, as it had strong ties with Vatican, which could propagate anti-Albanian feelings. Once the official decree was passed, hundreds of clergy members were put in jail, tortured, executed; everybody who was working at religious institutions was considered as guilty of crimes against the state. As Father Gardin recalls, "my jailers did not care if any of us were innocent. Their objective was to expel from Albania all people and institutions linked to religion or the Church. Their aim was to eliminate even the slightest possibility of ideological or political opposition."¹²⁹ Father Gardin describes the events that began in 1945; this serves as yet another proof that the underground "war against religion" started not right away, but nevertheless shortly after the Communist party came to power. Among the reasons that Father Gardin lists for the start of anti-religious campaign in Albania include Albanian government trying to make "the clergy [...] obey the laws of the State"¹³⁰

It is remarkable that when Enver Hoxha met with Stalin, that is precisely the advice that was given to Hoxha by Stalin himself, "You must make the people quite clear about these laws and the hostility of the reactionary clergymen so that even that part of the population which believes in religion will clearly see that, under the guise of religion, the clergymen carry out activities hostile to the homeland and the people themselves."¹³¹ So the population was supposed to be educated and in a way "brainwashed" to think that the clergy, in the

¹²⁹ Gardin, Giacomo. *Banishing God in Albania: The Prison Memoirs of Giacomo Gardin*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, p. 29.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 152.

¹³¹ Enver Hoxha. *With Stalin*. Tirana: 8 Nentori Publishing House, 1979, Third Meeting, November 1949.

case of Father Gardin, the Catholic priests, worked as agents for the Vatican. Moreover, Father Gardin mentions a piece of very intriguing information that suggests that in May 1945 Hoxha met with Archbishop Gasper Thaci, the metropolitan of Shkodra and primate of Albania, and with Archbishop Vincenc Prendushi of Durres and “requested the separation of the Albanian Church from Rome, a constitution of a national Church and Church adherence to the new regime.”¹³² The Archbishops refused, both of them were arrested and died shortly after. This case illustrates the previously mentioned idea that by means of using the policy of atheism, Hoxha’s government attempted to secure its authority. The situation of the Muslims was slightly different, although they were also persecuted. Nevertheless, as Antonia Young point out, “Muslims were able to protect themselves by the use of *laqiya*, the principle of the moral code that permits Muslims under threat of persecution to conceal or even to deny their faith.”¹³³

Following a meeting with Hoxha, the above-mentioned Archbishop Vincenc Prendush was sentenced to twenty years of imprisonment at hard labor for being a fascist, an enemy collaborator, thus automatically being labeled as the enemy of the state and people. He and hundreds of other clergy members, no matter the age, became prisoners of their own religious beliefs. Father Zef Pllumi, a Franciscan priest was imprisoned for twenty-five years during Enver Hoxha’s time, but he managed to survive and to write his memoir. His harrowing experience as a Catholic priest in Stalinist Albania is recorded in his moving, seven hundred-page memoirs, *Rrno vetëm për me tregue* (I only live on to tell), published in Tirana in 2006, Father Zef Pllumi died in Rome on 25 September 2007. Father Zef describes one of the prisons where he was held and the kindness of its warden, thanking him for even

¹³² Giacomo Gardin. *Banishing God in Albania: The Prison Memoirs of Giacomo Gardin*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, p. 50.

¹³³ Young, p. 9.

though being a supporter of the regime, treating people with respect, generosity, and humanity.

In January 2011, I managed to set up an interview with the warden of the prison where Zef Pllumi was held.¹³⁴ The interview was conducted in Albanian with translator and lasted for about two hours in a pleasant and hospitable atmosphere. I asked him standard questions, listed in the section on methodology. I learned right from the start, that he still remains a devoted follower of Communism and an atheist. Although, he held a lot of information that could be useful, he was answering the questions reluctantly at times and preferred to share his memories in a form of monologue; in the end of the interview, which he did not want to be recorded, the interviewee asked to remain anonymous.¹³⁵ All that led me to believe that he was still reliving the past and was afraid that something he will say might be misunderstood. Nevertheless, I have established the legitimacy of his claims, especially in terms of the positions he held, by checking his party documents and by crosschecking the facts in Zef Pllumi's book.

Mr. Flamur was born in 1928, into a practicing Bektashi family, and at the moment when the atheist state was established, he was about forty years old and held a high position in state prison/ security/ intelligence apparatus. As he recalls, right before Communists came to power in 1944, he, after becoming familiar with Marxist-Leninist teachings, chose to "convert" to atheism. When the war against religion started, he accepted it with proper enthusiasm, as he himself also considered any religious beliefs as backward, moreover he always considered Albanians to believe into something other, than Gods, something that unites them better than any religion could. While the party propagated the necessity of all

¹³⁴ The whole interview was conducted in Albanian language, in Tirana, Albania in January 2011, translated by Ervis Sulejmani.

¹³⁵ Note: from this section onwards the name used to distinguish the first interviewee will be Mr. Flamur.

religious establishments to be eradicated and “fanatical” rituals banned from people’s minds, there was an open call for religious people to give up their ideas, clothing, and places of worship, backed up by the appeal to patriotic sentiments. Moreover, the war against religion became some sort of a patriotic duty of each Albanian. All religions came to be considered as something brought from outside, something foreign and not connected with Albanian nation: Muslim religion became equated with Ottomans; Orthodox with Greek chauvinism, Catholics became associated with Vatican, and even Italian Fascism. Overall, according to Alban, religion in Albania, especially in the countryside had a more pragmatic interpretation, more traditions and customs oriented. The war against religion continued further, with the clergy members no longer being able to acquire a religious education, as religious literature got banned. It was much harder to deal with Muslims, since there was not much literature; everything was taken from the Quran and not interpreted, usually orally transmitted. Most of the people who considered themselves Muslim did not have any religious books in their houses; they were merely taught how to follow cannons. Taken into account that the Muslims composed over seventy percent of population, it is clear that most of them had only limited knowledge, and did not understand Arabic, as Quran was published in Albanian only in late 1980s. There existed two main ambitions: to make religion fight against its own dogmas and to understand that they are wrong and secondly, to make people understand that these dogmas have become part of everyday life of so-called believers and people practice them not because they actually believe, but because it became the force of habit, an inertia. When asked about the time he worked as a warden, and about members of clergy that were prisoners in the establishment where he worked, he followed the party line and said that they were imprisoned for crimes against the state/people, not for being affiliated with religion. However, he also mentioned that he met many interesting people, including Father Zef Pllumi and he treated them with respect and learned

a lot from them, because members of clergy, especially the Catholics were very well-educated and intelligent people. Alban seemed to me as a person who provided to me an official party explanation of the campaign, therefore I understood that for certain people, especially the ones who participated in the political apparatus, these beliefs constituted a part of who they are and became deeply rooted into their minds.

The second interview was conducted in March 2011 in the town of Berat in Albanian and partially in English language.¹³⁶ The interviewee, Mr. Ajet Nallbani was asked the same set of questions as the previous respondent. Mr. Ajet Nallbani used to hold the position of the director of Cultural Monuments of the town of Berat. He was born in 1949, into the Muslim family. Mr. Nallbani was eighteen when the atheist state was proclaimed and was a student. Thus, he represented the target group for the Communist anti-religious propaganda. Among the basic things that were said about the campaign in general, some noteworthy points were made with respect to anti-religious struggle. The name of Gani Strazimiri, a communist and a guerrilla fighter, came up. According to Mr. Nallbani, Strazimiri was responsible for saving lots of important monuments, among which were religious buildings, during the anti-religious campaign.¹³⁷ Apparently he told to Hoxha, that “if all religious monuments, icons, frescos and stuff were destroyed, Albania would be a country without history, art and culture. We would not be proud of anything. Better be proud of these than to have nothing.” That is how lots of old churches and mosques remained till this day. According to Mr. Nallbani, Strazimiri designated people to go and select the most important monuments and to list reasons why this building was special, and then he would give the building a different function (warehouse, theater, etc.) and therefore, it would be preserved. The

¹³⁶ The interview was conducted in Albanian and English language, in Berat, Albania in March 2011, translated by Ervis Sulejmani.

¹³⁷ Note: This information was confirmed by some sources in Albanian language, mostly discussed in blogs.

second point made by Mr. Nallbani that I found particularly interesting is the fact that he said, that Albanian people back then and now are only slightly interested in religion. People were and are more concerned with science or literature, thus they use the church or the mosque, as a meeting point and then move to the outside cafes to continue their debates. Interview with Mr. Nallbani was light and pleasant, he was open to question and answered willingly. Nevertheless, the fact that Hoxha's campaign influenced him also was noticeable, as although he said that he is a believing Muslim at the moment, he also said that his wife is Christian, so they also go to churches and celebrate Christian holidays. He seemed to me as the perfect example of Albanian tolerance. Thus, according to responses, people were mostly doing what the government told them to and believed that at that time it was something that had to be done.

Chapter 4: Concluding Remarks

The present study demonstrates how the peculiar historical, political and religious development of Albania led to the proclamation of the first atheist state in 1967. Unlike in China for instance, where the abandonment of conventional religion during the Cultural Revolution did little to help the country achieve what Marx described as atheism and the Chinese leadership had to create a political religion to support its regime¹³⁸, in Albania state atheism itself became a political religion that was used to unify and homogenize Albanian population. Historical past that Albania went through made it become tolerant towards religions in general, all existing before Communism religions were considered to be foreign, except perhaps Bektashism that truly became associated with Albania. What is more significant for Albanians is their belief in common origin and the loyalty to their nation, defined by the common language and the tie to the land. Moreover, what is called “malleable spiritual core” is definitely present in Albanian nature, the religious or spiritual feeling that exist stay the same, just the circumstances change.¹³⁹

Nevertheless, partially because Albania never was unified under one religion, the policy of atheism introduced by Hoxha’s government became implemented with better success, than in Soviet Union or Mao’s China. Albanian atheism, based on the essentially Marxist notion of atheism, developed into a full-blown political religion constructed around the figure of a leader and it combined in it patriotism and religiosity. Although some resistance followed, mainly from the Catholic community, most of the population accepted the changes if not

¹³⁸ Jiping Zuo. “Political Religion: The Case of the Cultural Revolution in China”. *Sociological Analysis* No.52, Vol.1, (1991): 99-110, p. 109.

¹³⁹ Arthur E. Liolin. “The Nature of Faith in Albania. Towards the 21st Century.” *East European Quarterly* XXXI, no 2 (June 1997): p. 189.

with the open arms, than with the certain degree of enthusiasm. A significant issue that should not be overlooked: for once, people of Albania became united not just around language, or tie to the land or to fight with the enemy or an ideology; they became united around all these features simultaneously. According to Party's plans: the official language was supposed to become unified Tosk dialect, thus erasing the cultural, linguistic and traditional borders existing for centuries, there was the common enemy – the outside, and the common this time political religion – Albanian atheism.

Although the picture painted seems too perfect, indeed the persecutions that followed as the part of anti-religious, and in this case anti-establishment campaign cannot be simply disregarded. Thousands of unfit clergy members, especially Catholics from the Gheg community of the North were exiled, tortured, imprisoned and executed. Sadly, influenced by propaganda of the Communist leadership, much of the population of Albania participated in these persecutions, actually believing that they are freeing their beloved Albania from fascists, foreign spies, etc. Of course, the fact that they were being conditioned by the government does not justify their actions, however in the case of Albanians; it is significant to understand that years of being under the rule of foreign powers left the scar in people's hearts. By believing in Hoxha the Prophet and by collectively converting into atheism, people of Albania finally felt unique. The essential thing however is that as far as I am concerned, only in Albania with its unusual degree of tolerance towards different religions, their different approach to understanding religions and their history of being converted from one foreign religion to another, the experiment with making people believe into Hoxha's atheism could have been possible. Indeed, the only resistance that was provided to the regime's change was the Catholic Church, it was however too small and proved to be not as difficult to eliminate, unlike in the Soviet Union, where the Russian Orthodox Church for centuries proved to be a major institution

influencing political decision-making. In China, even though there was a certain degree of success in eliminating the formal workshop, the political religion established was very much similar with the conventional religions, with the only difference of God being substituted by Mao Zedong, the Red Sun. In the case of Albania, Hoxha did not try to assert his image as God, instead becoming just a prophet of a newly created political religion.

Appendices

Appendix 1

TO THE CHURCH OF SILENCE OF ALBANIA

By Luigina Aletti Comendulli, translated by Chris Schulte, S. J.

Your flag
Waves in the shade,
Church of Albania:
While your sons
Wander in exile!
Your Sanctuary resists the tempest,
As your Martyrs
Resist in the Faith.
Thus you grow
In the hear of the afflicted,
Who hope for heaven
In the shadow of the one Cross!
Worthily You are
The noble standard-bearer,
Mother of Heroes
Church of Albania,
Prisoner
Of the silence that inspires!¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Gjon Sinishta. *The Fulfilled Promise. A Documentary Account of Religious Persecution in Albania*. Santa Clara, CA: H&F Composing Service-Printing, 1976, p. 67.

Appendix 2

FALLEN FOR FAITH, JUSTICE, AND LIBERTY¹⁴¹

Roman Catholic Hierarchy

Bumci, Luigj. (Louis) (b. 1872-d. 1945). Bishop of Lezha, died while under police harassment on March 1, 1945, only three months after the Communist government was installed. He was head of the Albanian Delegation at the Paris Peace Talks in 1918. Bishop Gjini, abbot of the Abbey of St. Alexander of Oroshi (Mirdita) succeeded Bishop Bumci as administrator.

Gjini, Frano. (Francis) (b. 1886-d. 1948). Abbot Nullius of St. Alexander of Oroshi (Mirdita) and substitute Apostolic Delegate in Albania. Arrested in December 1947, and executed on March 8, 1948, along with seventeen other clerics and lay people.

Prendushi, Vincenz. (b. 1885-d. 1949). Metropolitan Archbishop of Durrës. Author and poet, a well known national figure. Condemned to twenty years at hard labor in 1947, died in prison February 23, 1949.

Shllaku, Bernardin. (b. 1875-d. 1973). Bishop of Pulti. Venerable prelate, after numerous arrests and continuous harassment, died in April 17, 1973.

Thaci, Gaspar. (b. 1889-d. 1946). Metropolitan Archbishop of Shkodra, and head of the Catholic Church in Albania. Died May 25, 1946, while under house arrest.

Volaj, Gjergj. (George) (b. 1904-d. 1948). Bishop of Sappa. Arrested in January 1948, and executed on February 3 of the same year, after horrible torture.

Monsignors

Bonati, Jul. (Julius) (b. 1873-d. 1951). Executed in Vlora.

Deda, Nikoll. (Nicholas) (b. 1890-d. 1948). Executed on March 8, 1948, after torture.

Haberi, Gjergj. (George) (b. 1874-d. 1950). Died in prison.

Tusha, Nikoll. (Nicholas). Died in labor camp.

Diocesan Priests

Arta, Marian. (Mario) (b. 1905-d. 1961).

Bicaj, Mark. (b. 1909-d. 1949).

Bici, Zef. (Joseph) (b. 1921-d. 1968).

Bushati, Jak. (Jacob) (b. 1894-d. 1949).

Cuni (Chuni) Mhill (Michael).

¹⁴¹ Gjoni Sinishta. *The Fulfilled Promise. A Documentary Account of Religious Persecution in Albania*. Santa Clara, CA: H&F Composing Service-Printing, 1976, p. 68-72.

Cuni (Chuni) Pjeter. (Peter) (b. 1911-d. 1946).

Deda, Ejell. (Angel) (b. 1907-d. 1947).

Dedaj, Martin.

Dragusha, Nikoll. (Nicholas).

Dredhaj, Alexander. (b. 1897-d. 1959).

Frisku, Rrok. (Rocco) (b. 1897-d. 1947).

Gaci, Marian. (Mario) (b. -----d. 1956).

Gazulli, Nikoll. (Nicholas) (b. 1891-d. 1946).

Gega, Ejell (Angel).

Gjani, Mark. (b. 1909-d. 1945).

Gjinaj, Nikoll. (Nicholas) (b. 1910-d. 1954).

Gjini, Pal. (Paul) (b. 1904-d. 1961).

Gjuraj, Rrok. (Rocco).

Gruda, Pjeter. (Peter) (b. 1923-d. 1967).

Kovaci, Ejell. (Angel) (b.-----d. 1957).

Kovaci, Gjon. (John) (b.-----d. 1964).

Kurti, Shtjefen. (Stephen) (b. 1898-d. 1972).

Laca, Tom. (b. 1905-d. 1956). Died in labor camp.

Laska, Nikoll. (Nicholas) (b. 1897-d. 1948).

Lufi, Ndre. (Andrew) (b. 1898-d. 1954). Died in labor camp.

Lufi, Pjeter. (Peter).

Macaj (Machaj), Ded. (Dominic) (b. 1921-d 1946).

Makaj, Anton. (b. 1924-d 1969).

Malaj, Ded. (Dominic) (b. 1920-d. 1959).

Malaj, Nikoll (Nicholas) (b. 1906-d 1948).

Marku, Tom. G. (b. 1919-d. 1963).

Marksen, Zef. (Joseph) (b. 1901-d. 1946).

Mazrreku, Nikoll. (Nicholas) (b.1902-d. 1957).

Mazrreku, Luigj. (Louis).

Mucaj, Ded. (Dominic) (b.-----d. 1964).
 Muzaj, Anton. (b.1922-d. 1948).
 Muzej, Pashko. (Pascal) (b. 1909-d. 1973).
 Muzhani, Pashko. (Pascal) (b. 1908-d. 1973).
 Nikaj, Ndoc. (Anthony) (b. 1864-d 1946).
 Nodej, Lorenz. (Lawence) (b. 1911-d. 1959).
 Pici, Luigj. (Louis) (b. 1901-d. 1946).
 Prendushi, Luigj. (Louis) (b. 1897-d. 1947).
 Prendushi, Nikoll. (Nicholas) (b. 1900-d. 1950).
 Qafalija, Prenk.
 Shantoja, Lazer. (Lazarus) (b. 1892-d. 1945).
 Shelqeti, Nikoll. (Nicholas) (b. 1896-d. 1948).
 Shkurti, Marin. (b. 1937-d. 1968).
 Shllaku, Zef. (Joseph) (b. 1890-d. 1950).
 Shllaku, Nikoll. (Nicholas).
 Shtufi, Zef. (Joseph) (b. 1898-d. 1946).
 Siridani, Alexander. (b. 1908-d. 1948).
 Suma, Anton. (b. 1891-d. 1962).
 Tracki, Alphonse. (b 1892-d. 1946).
 Tusha, Pjeter. (Peter).
 Zadeja, Ndre. (Andrew) (b. 1890-d. 1945).
 Zogaj, Anton. (b. 1897-d. 1947).
 Franciscans
 Ashiku, Augustin. (b. 1904-d.1946).
 Bardhi, Pashko. (Pascal) (b. 1870-d. 1948).
 Cani, Syril. (b. 1875-d.-----).
 Dema, Benedict. (b. 1895.-d 1960).
 Dodaj, Pal. (Paul) (b. 1880-d 1951).
 Gjecaj, Bone. (Bonaventure) (b. 1882-d. 1960).

Gjolej, Konrad. (b. 1911-d. -----).

Gurashi, Rroc. (Rocco) (b. 1894-d. 1962).

Harapi, Anton. (b. 1888-d. 1946).

Hila, Silvester. (b. 1905-d.-----).

Koda, Seraphim. (b. 1893-d. 1947).

Kurti, Donat. (b. 1903-d.-----).

Llupi, Bernard. (b. 1886-d. 1946).

Luli, Lek. (Alexander) (b. 1909-d. 1944).

Makaj, Dhionis. (Dionysius) (b. 1910-d.-----).

Miraj, Klement. (b. 1882-d. 1970).

Mitroviqui, Lorenz. (b. 1872-d. 1943).

Nika, Cyprian. (b. 1900-d. 1948).

Palaj, Barnardin. (b. 1894-d. 1947).

Pici, David. (b. 1907-d.-----).

Prela, Pashko. (Pascal) (b. 1877-d.-----).

Prendushi, Mati. (Matthias) (b. 1881-d. 1947).

Prendushi, Vicenz. (b. 1885-d. 1949).

Serreqi, Karl. (b. 1912-d. 1946).

Shajakaj, Leonard. (b. 1887-d.-----).

Shllaku, Barnardin. (b. 1875-d. 1973).

Shllaku, Gjon. (John) (b. 1901-d. 1946).

Siridani, Marin. (b. 1885-d. -----).

Suma, Gasper. (b. 1897-d. 1949).

Tagaj, Leonard. (b. 1894-d. 1946).

Jesuits

Berisha, Florian. (b. 1902-d. 1970).

Dejani, Daniel. (b. 1906-d. 1946).

Dodaj, Mark. (b. 1899-d. 1956).

Fausti, Gjon. (John) (b. 1889-d. 1946).

Giadri, Pashko. (Pascal) (b. 1877-d.1954).

Gjekaj, Gjek. (George) (b. 1888-d. 1975).

Harapi, Mark. (b. 1890-d. 1973).

Karma, Gjon. (John) (b. 1896-d. 1975).

Llarja, Edelbert. (b. 1897-d. 1965).

Markoviqi, Pal. (Paul) (b. 1894-d. 1966).

Pantalijs, Gjon. (John) (b. 1887-d. 1947).

Saraci, Anton. (b. 1882-d. 1947).

Saraci, Zef. (Joseph) (b. 1884-d. 1954).

Seminarists

Bici, Gjergj. (George) (b. 1925-d. 1962).

Bici, Ndoc. (Anthony).

Cuni, Gac. (Ignatius) (b. 1927-d. 1956).

Cuni, Mark. (b. 1924-d. 1946).

Gaci, Fran. (Francis) (b. 1926-d. 1945).

Gjoni, Augustin. (b. 1923-d. 1954).

Gjekaj, Fran. (Francis) (b. 1922-d. 1946).

Lesej, Prenk. (Primo) (b. 1920-d. 1965).

Tusha, Gjon. (John) (b. 1927-d. 1959).

Zadrima, Mark. (b. 1926-d. 1958).

Sisters

Bardhaniolli, Luigja. (Louisa).

Daici, Esther.

Daragiati, Josephine.

Hila, Alberta.

Leka, Pierina.

Liaria, Domenica.

Vulaj, Margarita.

Zojzi, Imelda.

Appendix 3

ENVER

By Sulejman Mato, published in the literary monthly, *Nëndori*, in September 1979.

I first heard those five dear letters at the dawn of my life.

Ever since, your name became as dear to me as my paternal home,

As precious as socialism,

As lofty as the mountains,

As vital as light...

We shout ENVER!

Ant the sky seems to us loftier than ever,

The space around us vaster,

The sun bigger,

And our perspectives ever more magnificent.

We shout ENVER!

And our days take on color and meaning

As they fall in like soldiers

Into the great ranks of the revolution.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Quoted in Peter R. Prifti, *Socialist Albania Since 1944: Domestic and Foreign Developments*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978, p. 182.

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