



THE LEGACY OF ALBANIAN COMMUNIST-ERA MOVIES: THEIR ROLE
IN SHAPING POST-COMMUNIST PERCEPTIONS OF THE REGIME

MASTER'S THESIS
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ABSTRACT

Cinema in general has proven to be quite a useful tool in generating emotional responses to certain topics and events and in shaping people's perceptions and understanding of history and political regimes. As a result, it was used as a means of propaganda during the communist regime in Albania, for the political elite to establish its power and promote the communist ideology and remains to this day, popular among the domestic audience. This research specifically is concerned with the role of Albanian communist-era movies in shaping the perceptions of those who were born after the demise of the regime as they did not experience the reality of the time themselves. Therefore, this mixed-method study aims to answer the research question "How do Albanian communist-era movies shape the perceptions of people born after the fall of communism regarding the communist regime in Albania?" The study contributes to the literature by providing insight into the complex relationship between Albanian communist-era movies and these perceptions.

Keywords: communist regime, communist-era movies, perceptions, propaganda

**TRASHËGIMIA E FILMAVE SHQIPTARË TË PERIUDHËS SË KOMUNIZMIT:
ROLI I TYRE NË FORMIMIN E PERCEPTIMEVE POST-KOMUNISTE MBI
REGJIMIN**

ABSTRAKT

Kinemaja në përgjithësi ka dëshmuar të jetë një mjet mjaft i dobishëm në gjenerimin e përgjigjeve emocionale ndaj tematikave dhe ndodhive të caktuara dhe në formësimin e perceptimeve dhe të kuptuarit të historisë dhe regjimeve politike. Për pasojë, ato u përdorën edhe si mjete propagande gjatë regjimit komunist në Shqipëri për konsolidimin e pushtetit nga elita politike dhe promovimin e ideologjisë komuniste, për të qenë popullore edhe sot e kësaj dite midis audiencës vendase. Megjithatë, ky studim fokusohet në rolin e filmave shqiptarë të periudhës së komunizmit dhe rolin e tyre në formimin e perceptimeve të njerëzve të lindur pas rënies së regjimit, të cilët nuk e kanë përjetuar vetë realitetin e kohës. Për këtë arsye, ky studim me metoda mikse synon t'i përgjigjet pyetjes kërkimore "Si ndikojnë filmat shqiptarë të periudhës së komunizmit në perceptimet e njerëzve të lindur pas rënies së komunizmit mbi regjimin komunist në Shqipëri?" Studimi kontribuon në literaturë duke ofruar një pasqyrim të marrëdhënieve kompleksve midis filmave shqiptarë të prodhuar gjatë regjimit komunist dhe këtyre perceptimeve.

Fjalët kyçe: regjimi komunist, filmat e periudhës së komunizmit, perceptimet, propaganda

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Master Thesis, titled “The legacy of Albanian Communist-era Movies: Their role in shaping post-communist perceptions of the regime” is based on my original work except quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that this thesis has not been previously or concurrently submitted for the award of any degree, at Epoka University, any other university, or institution.

Enxhi Begvarfaj

16 June 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

Movies have now for nearly a century been acknowledged as a powerful tool that can influence how people perceive and understand history, historical events, and political regimes. Specifically, this study explores the mostly unstudied topic of Albanian communist-era movies and how they affect the perceptions of people who were born after the communist regime of the dictatorship in Albania. Using both qualitative and quantitative analysis, this study seeks to understand the relationship between these movies and the perceptions of the participants in the study, through focus-group discussions held at Epoka University and the responses received by distributing a mass survey online.

The research work sheds some light on the complex role that Albanian communist-era movies play in the shaping of perceptions for the people born after the fall of the communist regime. At the same time, it also fills a gap in the literature, adding to the body of knowledge on the role that movies play in portraying and understanding a political regime. By comparing the findings with the existing literature, it serves as a starting point for other researchers to further explore the topic in the context of Albania, while answering the research question “How do Albanian communist-era movies shape the perceptions of people who were born after the fall of communism of the communist regime in Albania?” The research is not guided by a hypothesis, but it hopes to extend the knowledge on the topic by navigating the data as best as possible.

The study sets off by presenting a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the relationship between historical events and movies and political regimes and movies. As it explores the movies’ effectiveness as vehicles of propaganda, it then moves to presenting the knowledge on communism as an ideology, its application in Albania and raising the question

on whether the theories on the role that movies play on the perceptions of people towards a regime are applicable for Albania as well. It then moves to the methodology section to present the data collection methods employed, explaining in depth the process of conducting the focus-group discussions following several movie screenings of Albanian communist-era movies and the administration of mass survey to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a bigger sample of people. Finally, it presents the findings of both qualitative and quantitative analysis, providing insight into the topic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The relationship between movies and history

“Our sense of the past is shaped and limited by the possibilities and practices of the medium in which the past is conveyed, be it the printed page, the spoken word, the painting, the photograph, or the moving image” (Rosenstone, 1995). This means that what the public understands from movies is limited to whatever images they are watching on screen, at the possibility of it being a different past from what is written in history books, and oftentimes different from what actually came about (Rosenstone, 1995). Even though a movie may try to show history as it happened (or the opposite), it can never represent a one hundred percent accurate description of the events that transpired. Movies that represent historical events often portray images of revolutions, battles, or struggles, and even in this case, they contain elements of fiction that allow for certain ‘evidence’ to stand out against the historical event (Rosenstone, 1995).

In 1988, Hayden White coined the term ‘historiophoty’ which translates to “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse”. According to Rosenstone (1995), there are two main viewpoints that prevail: the explicit and implicit ones. The explicit approach is concerned with movies as reflections of the social and political areas of interest of the period in which they came to be made (Rosenstone, 1988), while the implicit one considers movies as written text transferred to the screen, which means that they can also be judged by the same logic that we use for written history books. Rosenstone (1988) notes however that at least documentaries are tinted with nostalgia. To quote Professor Louis Gottschalk of the University of Chicago (1935): “If the cinema art is going to draw its subjects

so generously from history, it owes to its patrons and its own higher ideals to achieve greater accuracy. No picture of a historical nature ought to be offered to the public until a reputable historian has had a chance to criticize and revise it”.

What is so special about movies is that in terms of popularity among the masses, it creates a world that books on history cannot, which can reach even the illiterate, and is the reason why they started to be used heavily by different regimes in the 20th century to promote their own ideologies (Carey, 1997). Those movies offer us a window to a past that is now concluded and cannot be changed on the screen. At the same time, at the hands of professional actors, it portrays history in a very emotional and dramatic way, leaving no doubts about its credibility. While historians may not agree with movies as professional forms of representing historical truth, they do agree on their power to overwhelm other forms of memory by using persistent images of the past (Guynn, 2013). This is also true for documentaries, as the director has intentionally decided to record certain images and events, from certain angles and for specific reasons, in order to shape whatever is to be served to the public (Guynn, 2013) The most important example of the 20th century is the movie “Triumph of the Will” produced by Leni Riefenstahl in 1935, depicting the power of Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler at the 1934 Nuremberg Rally.

When it comes to the current day, representing history in movies is a dangerous task because it can hurt public memory. Anton Kaes (1992), goes as far as to acknowledge mass media as the most effective institutional vehicle for shaping historical consciousness. Specialized in German movies, he defends the idea that movies that portray historical events can replace historical imagination. Therefore, mass media and movies specifically can serve as catalysts for remembering, while also encouraging new public discussion on collective memory. To really understand the power of movies, according to Rosenstone (2006, pp. 13), we need to take a look at how Russian director Sergei Eisenstein used “a minor incident from the revolution of 1905, a mutiny on a Black Sea battleship, and turned it into a stunning metaphor meant to show how the proletariat can overturn oppression and make a revolution” in “Battleship Potemkin”. All types

of motion pictures, as long as they portray a historical event or figure, make an assumption about history and what they consider important for the audience to learn.

As Professor Weinstein (2001, p. 41) said: “Film is an invaluable resource in the study of history, but one that must be used carefully”. He warns of our inability to distinguish the hidden messages' meaning of what we watch, to the point that we become indifferent to them and fail to take a critical approach to them. Whatever filter the movie presents the events through, it is our perspective that interprets them. This can be especially painful and arguable for controversial events in history (Marcus, Metzger, et al., 2010), but this is important in the context of historical education, as it elicits alternative and controversial interpretations of past events, leading to critical thinking. Movies can also help people who have not experienced the past firsthand to challenge their knowledge and understanding of it (Marcus, Metzger, et al., 2010) albeit not in favor of accuracy.

2.2. Political regimes and movie propaganda

2.2.1. Political propaganda

Hitler spoke considerably of propaganda in his work “Mein Kampf” (1925), arguing that it served merely as a means that should be judged regarding its end. He argued that the aim of propaganda was not to study the truth objectively, but merely to be used with the masses. The choice to start this section with “Mein Kampf” is not sporadic, but based on the indisputable truth that Nazi Germany produced one of the most effective propaganda machines ever created. This study supports the claim that there is propaganda in cinematic works and that propagandistic movies can shape the perceptions of people towards a political regime, which will further contribute to answering my research question.

Propaganda researchers initially focused on propaganda in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, as the best-documented cases of politicization (Taylor, 2003). In political science, politicization is defined as “moving something into the realm of public choice” (Zürn, 2019, p. 978) so the link between the two is evident. According to Bartlett (1940), “propaganda is an organized and public form of the process which the psychologists call ‘suggestion’. It may involve two very different kinds of social relationships. The first and most widely known is based upon a relationship of superiors and inferiors; the second one is upon one of friendliness or comradeship. Political propaganda is almost wholly the first form of suggestion.” As Bartlett (1940) explained, political propaganda is developed by the State itself, within the State, targeting its own population. This sort of propaganda needs to be able to influence a large number of people, while not demanding too much intellect from the public (Hitler, 1925). Usually, propaganda is more present in totalitarian regimes (Chapman, 2000), with dictators seeing it as a mass persuasion and control tool. This study focuses on the analysis of political propaganda, and more explicitly that expressed through films produced during the communist regime in Albania.

Political propaganda’s roots can be found as early as 1622 when the Catholic Church established the Office for Propagating the Faith to fight the spread of Protestantism (Hyzen, 2020). Other sources suggest that it was first used back in the Roman Empire (Bernays, 1928). Simply put, propaganda is an effort to influence the masses, which is why it took off in the early 20th century with the development of mass media, as now the message could reach the desired audience more easily. This is when the word itself started taking on a bad connotation as it was used mostly by cruel regimes to control all sources of information, which will be explored in the next sections. However, it is worth noting that while propaganda can be false and delivered insincerely, a true statement can also be propaganda (Stanley, 2015). According to him, understanding the relationship between propaganda and ideology is a necessity. In all cases there is a pattern in all its studies: characterized by censorship and repression, communicated through mass media, and tempering with education (Bartlett, 1940).

The first propaganda theories were developed nearly around the same years, with Laswell developing the first one in 1927. Regardless of being a political scientist, Laswell recognized the value of applying psychological theories in politics. According to him, the effectiveness of propaganda did not lie so much in its content rather than people's vulnerability and their state of mind. People find reassurance in propaganda when they are going through daily hardships, as was political conflict and economic depression during the war years (Laswell, 1927). That is also the psychological imbalance that led to manipulation after the economic depression in Germany. For Laswell (1927), propaganda did not simply consist of lies to control the masses, but it required a well-developed, slow strategy to introduce new ideas, for people to accept them. Once these ideas are introduced according to the political scientist, master symbols (Laswell, 1927) could be created, which when used wisely, would stimulate large-scale mass action. For Laswell, the only solution to avoid 'evil propaganda' was for social scientists to use 'good propaganda'.

Walter Lippmann (1922), one of the greatest academics and opinion leaders of the time shared the same thoughts as Laswell when it comes to the inability of the average people to distinguish the real from the fake in their social world and act rationally. In one of his early writings, he even compared the average citizen to a deaf spectator sitting in the back row (Lippman, 1993). According to Lippmann (1925, p. 4): "He lives in a world he cannot see, does not understand, and is unable to direct". Unlike Laswell however, Lippmann believed that the damage of propaganda could be subsidized by the establishment of some sort of agency or mechanism that could protect them from it (Baran and Davis, 2011). Unfortunately, these ideas are only applicable in democratic states. The aforementioned theories were brought up as the most relevant ones in the field of mass communication theory as they both offer the necessary insights in understanding the role of movies in shaping and transforming ideas, as a form of mass media. Furthermore, both theories were developed in the previous century, when the Albanian movies subject to this research were also produced.

2.2.2. Political propaganda in movies

According to Anatoly Lunacharsky (Gérin, 2018), one of the Russian revolutionaries in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, in one of their conversations, Lenin said: “You must remember always that of all the arts, the most important for us is the cinema”. Once Lenin came to power, it was impossible to distinguish Soviet movies as anything else but a Bolshevik policy (Kepley, 1990). Differently from movies in the West, which answered more to the market and had a commercial purpose, Soviet movies were completely state-owned, answered to the government, and were controlled by the Cinema Committee of the Commissariat (Kepley, 1990). Its purpose was to produce educational documentaries that would serve the government to promote its own ideology (Kepley, 1990).

The reason why movies were seen in such high regard by propagandists such as Lenin, Hitler, and Stalin is that it is the only mass medium. No matter the level of education of its audience, it was bound to influence it by what it showed on the screen. Bartlett (1940) claimed that the type of propaganda is related to the general level of education. If the general level of education is low, propaganda tends to be amusing and the media tends to be “pictorial, dramatic, somewhat crudely symbolical” (p. 30). According to the author, this could also probably explain why Russia started to explore propaganda so early, through popular art. In order to recognize and combat the effects of propaganda, it is also of great importance to identify the propaganda techniques, which were frequently used in movie productions as well as other forms of media: name-calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, bandwagon, and card-stacking (Lee and Lee, 1939).

According to Lee and Lee (1939), ‘name-calling’ consists of negative labeling, to make the public reject and denounce an idea without considering examining the evidence, a technique effectively used by Nazi Germany to castigate the Jewish community in movies like “Jud Süß” or “The Eternal Jew”. Often, this portrayal of one subject can affect entire nations and the future

of millions of people (Severin, 2013). Another technique used is that of ‘glittering personalities’ which translates into the use of simple catchphrases, statements, and slogans which are not backed by evidence (Lee and Lee, 1939), as was the purity and superiority of the Aryan identity, again found in Nazi Germany. The third and one of the most interesting techniques is the ‘transfer’ one according to which, the authority or prestige of a respected action or event, is shifted to something or someone else, to be more acceptable (Lee and Lee, 1939). This is the case of the appropriation of the liberation efforts by the communists during the Italian and Nazi regime in Albania, which was promoted heavily in Albanian movies during Hoxha’s regime.

The ‘testimonial’ technique is concerned with using respected or disliked people to endorse certain ideas (Lee and Lee, 1939). This is typically used in political campaigns (Severin, 2013) and was evident when Stalin came to power after the death of Lenin, whose support he used to gain the support of the general population, although there is contrasting evidence on the truthfulness of his claims. “Plain folks” is in all likelihood the most frequently used technique as the propagandist uses ideas ‘of the people’ or as the name itself indicates, ‘of the plain folk’ (Lee and Lee, 1939). This is typically used in politics, even to this day. ‘Card stacking’ is the utilization of selective arguments and evidence to support a certain statement, no matter how logical or illogical they are (Lee and Lee, 1939). This was present in the Chinese Cultural Revolution when evidence of the deterioration of the process was masked over a long time, leading to famine and economic bankruptcy. The last one being ‘bandwagon’, is the propagandist’s attempt to get the public to jump on the same bandwagon, as they claim widespread support (Lee and Lee, 1939). This is typical during war times when leaders convince the masses that everyone is making sacrifices, evident also in Albanian movies, as literal children died for the liberation of the country.

According to Chapman (2000), it was probably the techniques used by the Soviets in the 1920s, which emphasized the relationship between how scenes were shot and the proximity of images that created meaning in movies, that inspired the development of propaganda movies everywhere else in the world. Almost every movie production during these years in the Soviet

Union revolved around Marxist messages and themes and conveyed political messages on overthrowing the bourgeoisie and celebrating the triumph of communism. The movie industry turned into an instrument of the government to guide them in building a strong socialist state (Chapman, 2000). Soviet Realism in the 1940s, during Stalin's governance, demanded of all artists and movie producers that a glorious, communist utopia was presented and that it was accessible to everyone, in order to achieve the education of the masses (Rosenblum, 2019). This did not bode well for Soviet movies as their quantity, and by 1951, less than ten movies were produced (Youngblood, 1991).

However, Nazi Germans were considered the masters of movie manipulation in the 20th century. As Hitler wrote in 'Mein Kampf' (1925): "The whole art consists in doing this [propaganda] so skillfully that everyone will be convinced that the fact is real, the process necessary, the necessity correct, etc. But since propaganda is not and cannot be a necessity in itself, since its function ... consists in attracting the attention of the crowd, and not in educating those who are already educated or who are striving after education and knowledge, its effect on the most part must be aimed at the emotions and only to a very limited degree at the so-called intellect...". According to Baran and David (2015, p. 55): "Media are able to directly influence the minds of average people, transforming their views of the social world". This was captured perfectly in what is considered to be the best propaganda movie of the last century, Germany's "Triumph of the Will", in which no words are spoken, but flags and uniforms came to symbolize much more.

Another regime that understood the importance of the motion picture in spreading an ideology and building a nation, was the Chinese Communist Party, which will be referred to as simply 'The CCP'. As Chen highlighted in his 2003 (p. 156) study, after 1949, "the CCP sought to direct everyday experience and expression toward a socialist future by altering the content of cinematic representation, the meaning of the cinematic experience itself and the constitution of the viewing public". Certain images were promoted throughout Communist China, which suggested the government's success in achieving collectivization and modernization, gender

equality by engaging women in typically male-dominated industries such as heavy industry, and overall, the image of the new China. What was a major achievement in Mao's approach to movies during the 1950s and the 1960s, was bringing them to rural locations as well as urban spaces, encouraging the idea that they also belonged in this China (Chen, 2003). It is worth noting that the movie industry was completely under the CCP's control and the movies produced followed the Maoist policy on art (Cheng, 1998). The case for Albania was somehow different.

2.2.3. Can movies shape people's perceptions towards a political regime?

Professor Pautz of Political Science at the University of Dayton back in 2015, conducted exploratory research on how movies influence opinions about government among her students. The movies selected were contemporary, namely "Argo" and "Zero Dark Thirty", both centered around government employees and themes, which were screened for her students. In this case, students completed a questionnaire before and after the screening, consisting of the same questions. What was interesting according to Pautz, is that the student's responses differed before and after the screening, and while she claims that "the direct causality of movie watching and its effects on its audience cannot be made; nevertheless, its findings are noteworthy". The findings conclude that between 1/5 and 1/4 of the participants changed their opinions after watching the movies. The study serves as an interesting starting point for analyzing how movies influence people's perceptions of a political regime as a whole.

Comparative politics defines a political regime as: "the formal and informal structure of state and governmental roles and processes. The regime includes the method of selection of the government and of representative assemblies (election, coup, decision within the military, [royal prerogative,], etc.), formal and informal mechanisms of representation, and patterns of repression" (Collier and Collier, 1991). Granberg (1993) on the other hand defines political perceptions as a process that helps people develop impressions of the characteristics and

positions of political candidates, parties, and institutions and it is studied mainly by political psychologists.

One of the main questions in political psychology when it comes to perceptions of a political regime is whether it, as a process, is determined by external influences (such as movies for example) or if it is the citizen's internal features that define it. This study will focus on external stimuli. Cioffi (2021) argues that movies can affect an audience's system of beliefs by clarifying already existing beliefs and enhancing them, or bringing new knowledge and fostering new ideas. After explaining the concept and role of propaganda, it is worth bringing again the case of Nazi Germany as the most successful in the task of feeding its audiences selective imagery and altering their perceptions of reality. "The Ministry of Illusion" as Renstchler calls it in his 1996 book, was the master of "reshaping the public imagination". Josef Goebbels, Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany himself said: "We are convinced that in general film is one of the most modern and far-reaching methods of influencing the masses. A regime thus must not allow film to go its own way."

In order to understand the influence of movies on the perceptions of people, the models of narrative effects (Green, Bilandzic, et al., 2019) were used to analyze the unique impact of narrative communication. Green and Brock (2002) developed what is known as the Transportation-Imagery Model which argues that beliefs can change when the audience is immersed or transported in a narrative world, especially because visual media like movies, can offer an experience similar to real life, which is particularly important in shaping attitudes. The Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model, on the other hand, suggests that depending on how appealing the storyline of the image is, the production quality and the similarities between the characters portrayed in the narrative and the viewer can shape the audience's perceptions of the persuasive content. Probably, one of the most important theories is the Social Cognitive Theory, which especially focuses on entertainment-education productions (Singhal, Cody, et al., 2003). What this theory proposes is that people learn from the actions and behaviors of the characters

they are observing in the narrative after seeing their consequences (Singhal, Cody, et al., 2003). Often, when those consequences are good, the audience will most likely mimic them.

When these narratives contain propagandistic elements and are political, these messages will be conveyed to the receiver, in this case, the audience. It is no wonder that the Cultural Revolution in the 1940s demanded not only that it represented Marxist Theory and Soviet Realism, but also made it accessible to everyone. In the case of Nazi Germany, a slightly different approach was taken, as not all movies consisted of propaganda as Goebbels considered entertainment key to keeping the Germans' spirits high, but no foreign movies that contained messages that could criticize the regime at the time were allowed (Jason, 2013). Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, both totalitarian regimes, were the ones where propaganda through movies was the most effective in political indoctrination and social control (Chapman, 2000). In this case, it is worth concluding that based on evidence, movies do indeed influence the perceptions of people on a regime while they are living it, a finding that has inspired this research to test if the same approach is applicable in Albania, but in a different era, as people look at it retrospectively.

2.3. On movies and the communist regime in Albania

2.3.1. The Communist Ideology

It is difficult to think of communism without thinking of socialism and it is even harder to separate the two in the context of their implementation in the 20th century, which is why the literature review will often present the ideas and quote former leaders by using both terms. For the sake of accuracy and to distinguish between the two, this section will offer an explanation of both philosophies, while focusing more on communism, whose practice shaped history as we know it. Both their origins date back to Plato's Republic (386b), but it was Marx and Engels who laid the groundwork for both and established the idea of a new ideology that could arise out of capitalism and start a self-emancipatory proletarian revolution (Marx and Engels, 1848).

It is worth emphasizing the fact that they did not distinguish between communism and socialism and often used them interchangeably, unlike the popular belief today that one is a transitory stage to the other (Smith, 2014).

Socialism was a result of the worsening social and economic conditions for the working class as a result of industrialization. In that sense, it was a critique of capitalism and market economy and it sought to offer more humane conditions for the industrial working class, who at that point suffered poverty and worked in disgraceful conditions, while the rich accumulated more wealth (Marx and Engels, 1848). According to Heywood (2017), at the beginning of the 20th century, socialism came to be seen in three different ways: as an economic model, linked to collectivization and planning while it stood as an alternative to capitalism; an instrument for the labor movement, working towards more economic and political power for the working class; and as an ideology which represents values and ideas such as community, cooperation, equality, class politics, and common ownership.

Two main movements took place at the beginning of the last century on the achievement of socialism: fundamentalist socialism and revisionist socialism (Heywood, 2017). The first movement was led by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, and sought to overthrow the current political system, claiming that socialism was only to be achieved by revolutionary means, which would inevitably require violence. The second movement had worn off its revolutionary character as working conditions in capitalist countries started to improve (Heywood, 2017), so what they sought instead was the establishment of a socialist party, which would compete in democratic elections, rather than incite violence and start a revolution. However, what history came to know better, is the socialist revolution in 1917, when Lenin and the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia through a coup d'état. The rise to power came in contradiction with Marx's and Engel's teachings that the Bolsheviks claimed to uphold, according to whom, the revolution would come from the class-conscious proletariat, that would rise up, seize the means of production, and overthrow capitalism (Marx and Engels, 1848). Thus started the process of the establishment of

the first communist government in Europe, what would be known as the Soviet Union. The red bloc would cease to exist in 1991.

The distinction between communism and Marxism is worth mentioning as well, as the first one is a governmental system built on the principles of Marxism, while Marxism in itself is a theory developed by Karl Marx in the 19th century. As will be noted later on in the study, Enver Hoxha, former leader of communist Albania, will often make references to the principles of Marxism-Leninism in his speeches, justifying the means of achieving and maintaining socialism in the country. After the publishing of the Communist Manifesto in 1848, in which Marx and Engels laid the foundation for communism, the distinction between socialism and communism became clearer as communism stuck to revolutionary action to throw the capitalist order, whereas socialism to more constitutional means (Dragnich, 1960). The way both communist and socialist regimes later on used the terms is by often relying on the latter as an ideology that would have led to communism, the ultimate goal. To conclude, communism is a utopia, the ideal society in which the means of production belong to the people and its distribution is based on the principle of “to each according to his contribution”. In reality, these ideals never came to materialize as Marx and Engels intended.

2.3.2. Communist Albania

“Who and what we are as individuals, communities and nations are indelibly formed by our sense of history and the way individual and collective memory is understood, commemorated and propagated” (Smith, 2006). While this project does not seek to focus on the study of individual and collective memory, it does rely heavily on history. As the former President of the Soviet Union, Mr. Gorbachev, stated in one of his last interviews while on duty: “History is a capricious lady, but I hope that it will judge me fairly”. This work neither intends to judge, nor interpret the data on what is one of the most important eras in Albania’s modern history, but it does feel motivated to criticize the current school literature on its limited role in teaching young

people about the communist past in the country. In that sense, it is important that this work starts by briefly introducing the reader to how communism in Albania came to be and its features in order to be able to better understand the research question and its analysis.

Ironically, even to this day, we cannot think of communism without thinking of Enver Hoxha, so it is only fair to start this section by introducing the dictator, who ruled Albania for forty-one years. Hoxha came from a middle-class family in the city of Gjirokastër, spoke French and as few people in the early 20th century in Albania, won a government scholarship to study in France. These were the days when the communist specter, as Marx put it “was haunting Europe”, so as a young man, Hoxha returned to Albania in 1939 and became active in a local communist group (Abrahams, 2015). In 1939, Albania was invaded by Mussolini, and capitulated in 1934, only for it to be occupied by Germany later on. WWII was also the period when Hoxha made a name for himself and the Albanian Communist Party was established.

Worth noting is the fact that the Albanian Communist Party only came to be because of Yugoslavia’s support in November 1941. During WWII, the Partisan forces composed mostly of communists, but also nationalists (whose movement was called Balli Kombëtar), played a great role in the national resistance, with Enver Hoxha and commander Mehmet Shehu being two of the most notable figures. In 1944, the Partisans formed a provisional government, and Enver Hoxha became prime minister. The communist resistance against the fascists would be used for many years to come as propaganda by the regime (Abrahams, 2015), to convince the masses that the partisans had liberated Albania, failing to mention Yugoslav and British help, and so started the communist rule in the country.

In 1945, the first elections since the liberation was held, and a new assembly formed of mostly communists, declared “The People’s Republic of Albania”, whose prime minister, foreign minister, defense minister, and the army’s commander in chief would be Hoxha himself (Abrahams, 2015). As soon as he was appointed to the highest positions, he started sentencing

supporters of Balli Kombëtar and the former monarch to death. Tito's Yugoslavia provided the necessary help to avoid starvation and start the process of transformation, but as soon as they cut ties with Stalin in the Soviet Union, so did Hoxha, starting another wave of purges and executions, only to turn to the Soviet Union, whose presence (and absence later on) would be felt greatly among Albanians.

At Stalin's suggestion, the party's name changed to the Albanian Party of Labor in 1948, and with the Soviet Union's aid, Albania managed to see major improvements in electricity production, levels of literacy, and health care results (Abrahams, 2015). The relationship went sideways after Stalin's sudden death, when the new leader, Khrushchev, asked for dispersion of power (which is how Mehmet Shehu came to be appointed prime minister) as well as denounced Stalin's cult of personality. Hoxha came to Stalin's defense and another wave of purges within the party started, to eliminate all Soviet supporters. The honeymoon phase soon ended, and once the relationship between the Soviet Union and China, another communist actor, turned sour in 1960, Hoxha backed China and then Albania started to rely on China for large-scale economic aid. Hoxha even copied Mao's Cultural Revolution, which will be further explored later in the study, revamping the entire education system to avoid foreign ideas and starting mass imprisonments of artists.

If there is something that Hoxha often took pride in declaring is that Albania was the only true socialist country in the world, so when China started opening up to the West, he also cut ties with them, leading Albanians to self-isolationism, self-reliance, and into a corner. Rationing became normal as there was a food shortage all around the country. The technology and expertise provided by China before they cut ties with Albania was not as Soviet Union's to begin with, so the production dropped and Albanians had only Hoxha to look to. Rumors have been circulating for years on what happened on the night of December 18th, 1981, when Mehmet Shehu, prime minister at the time, and one of Hoxha's comrades during the liberation war days passed away. The following morning it was announced that he had committed suicide, triggered by the engagement of one of his sons to a woman, whose relative was an anti-communist.

Hoxha himself passed away on April 11th, 1985, following years of health issues and Ramiz Alia, one of his trustees in the Party succeeded him. The news was received with shock and seven days of mourning were declared to honor the falling dictator (The New York Times, 1985). The following years were marked by uncertainty and in 1990 protests had already started erupting in Shkodër and Kavajë (Abrahams, 2015). In December 1990, the Central Committee of the Party declared the first pluralist elections since the installment of communism in the country. In 1992, the Democratic Party came into power and thus, a new chapter began, away from communism and into a disorderly transition to liberalism.

It is important to note the efforts made during Hoxha's rule on the creation of his myth, which is also tied to the research question and the study of Albanian movies during the communist regime. According to Hysi et al. (2014), "Hoxha funneled the entire communist propaganda toward highlighting the unchallengeable role of the Party in the life of the country". Enver Hoxha's ability to secure his hold on power by manipulating the internal dynamics of the society at the time has been analyzed in greater length in Isa Blumi's work (1999). A state-led campaign was launched which transformed education into a "communist education" (Blumi, 1999), and art, including movies, was used to construct a socialist society. At the same time, according to the International Commission on Missing Persons (2021), 5,501 people were executed by the communist apparatus, and thousands more were sent to prison at the hands of Sigurimi.

2.3.3. A case for Albania

According to the sociologist James Carey (1997), the media in general, and radio and movies specifically, can shape the beliefs and behavior of the general public, the latter distinctively as a form of illiterate media. After all, the whole idea behind the propaganda is to alternate people's realities in such a way that they end up welcoming the established reality in these movies as their own. Heba (2017, p. 3), argues that "Political communication as a concept, is neutral to propaganda. As a rule, there is no political communication without propaganda, even in cases

when it seems as if it objectively presents a political event, still, it is done with a specific propagandistic objective”. Williams's (2020) and Grgić's (2020) studies, which will be presented later in the study, have pointed towards the same approach when it comes to Albanian movies during the communist regime, until its fall in 1990.

This study focuses on the role of movies in the perceptions of people towards a regime. The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines it as a particular government, or a system or a method of government' and a particular way of operating or organizing a system, an economy, etc.' Marxism-Leninism was the official ideology adopted by communist countries, as was the case of Albania, who as many of its contemporaries used movies as a mechanism to transform the Albanian society and spread its ideas. Similar to the Soviet Union (Rosenblum, 2019), movie productions in Albania also told stories of simple individuals, which made them also more relatable to the general population. Unfortunately, Albanian movies are not as well-studied as Nazi movies, the Soviet Union's, or Communist China's (Williams, 2020), the first study on Albanian movies was conducted by Kinostudio in 1997, called “The Albanian Film”. The study, however, was a simple summary and categorization of the Albanian movies produced until that time, as part of the regime's political agenda (Williams, 2020).

Clear guidance was given to artists at the 18th Plenary of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor by Enver Hoxha himself (1965, pg. 6): “Our new literature and art, national in form and socialist in content, follow this course too... When you read them, hear them, or see them, you are seeing and feeling the pulse of the life and struggle of our people”. Unlike in other dictatorships, Hoxha encouraged studying foreign literature and music, arts, theater, and cinematography, but emphasized ‘choosing what is good’. The work should have been based on and inspired by Marxist-Leninist ideology (Williams, 2020). “The Party's policy in the field of art and literature has been and is clear to everybody. It will always give powerful support to the good works, the correctly inspired works, those that educate, mobilize, and open perspectives... With those who are confused in their works from the ideological, political and artistic point of view, in content or form, it is the duty of the Party to correct them with patience” (Hoxha, 1965,

p. 7). All productions were required to follow the thematic line of the Albanian Ministry of Culture, and every writer and director was obliged to make a movie every couple of years after submitting the movie scripts to the artistic council and receiving approval (Williams, 2020).

The first Albanian movies were produced before WWII by foreign companies, but considering that the majority of them did not survive the war, its genesis is considered to be in 1952, when “Kinostudio Shqipëria e Re”, the national movie studio was established (Grgić, 2020). However, the first attempt by the regime to take control of movies in the country was in 1946, when the Albanian State Enterprise of Cinematography was founded, reporting directly to the Ministry of Press, Propaganda, and Popular Culture (Williams, 2020). During the era of friendly relations with the Soviet Union, a lot of young artists received an education abroad, which allowed Albanian movie makers to follow foreign trends and experiment with new techniques and forms (Grgić, 2020). Once communist Albania cut ties with the Soviet Union, as with financial aid in other sectors, China took its place by supplying Kinostudio with equipment, as well as signed a bilateral agreement with Albania in 1962, according to which both countries would supply each other with an equal number of movies (Mëhilli, 2011). Massive funds were used for the spread of ideological and propaganda purposes when it came to movie productions (Williams, 2020).

Kinostudio’s Manifesto (Williams, 2015) clearly states: “An important feature of Albanian films is that the positive hero, the new man educated by the Party, occupies the central position. Socialism is the affirmation of the new, the positive, and the progressive. This is brought out clearly on the screen through heroes who are distinguished by their spiritual strength and moral purity, and their readiness to sacrifice themselves. They are completely devoted to the Party, the people, and socialism, and have a profound hatred for the enemy, either internal or external” (p. 105). It is evident that Kinostudio’s cinematic works aimed to fulfill the regime’s political and social objectives, although some directors such as Xhanfise Keko were able to find loopholes in the official orthodoxy (Williams, 2013). Cinemas were privatized as everything else was privately owned in the past, but a lot of new cinemas and entertainment houses were established to spread the gospel of the Party even in rural and remote areas (Grgić, 2020). Enver Hoxha

used the Albanian communist movies to also build a myth for himself (Hysi et al., 2014). According to Hysi et al. (2014, p. 78), “party secretaries, army officers, secret service agents, teachers and young professionals who respond to Hoxha’s call and go to work and live among the working class or peasantry in the countryside, are fictional heroes more representing the intelligent design of Hoxha’s Socialist New Man than random characters of communist Albania”.

The most important feature of the Albanian communist-era movies is that the characters are dedicated to the Party and the ideals of socialism. The most accurate categorization of these movies was presented by Kinostudio itself in the mid-1970s (Williams, 2012) and it was based on their thematics. According to Williams (2012) these included: the National Liberation War, constructing the new Socialist country, protecting the Socialist revolution, reconstructing Albania, collectivization in the countryside, the Socialist New Man, emancipation of women, family life, human struggles against wrong ideas, and lastly, family life. These were in line with the internal struggles and agenda of communist Albania and the Fourth Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Worker’s Party of Albania in 1973 (Williams, 2012) played a special role in affirming that all artists uphold the values of Socialist Realism and reject foreign influence. As Williams (2012) argues, all the work and effort put into elevating Albanian cinema also served as a means of distraction for the Albanian population, as Albania was growing increasingly more isolated from the outside world.

When it comes to Albania’s relationships with the foreign world, the ones with the Soviets and the Chinese had the most influence in the development of Albanian cinema, although their impact went hand-in-hand with domestic affairs and changed as many times as Hoxha asked for it (Grgić, 2020). Especially after the National Liberation War, Albanian cinema was mostly focused on representing the partisan nationalist war struggles, reflecting the Marxist ideology of the socialist hero, which was similar to what was taking place in the Soviet Union at the time. “Debatik” is a movie that better reflects these struggles and upholds the figure of national heroes (Grgić, 2020). The birth of Albanian cinema during the communist regime corresponds with the

professional training and education of filmmakers in Soviet countries, who would go on to make a rich contribution to Albania's art scene at the time. Later on, as Albania developed close relations with the Chinese, movies had a didactic role and served as an educational tool in the development of the "New Socialist Man" (Grgić, 2020). According to Grgić (2020), this was the stage when Hoxha solidified his cult of personality. The movies during this period focused on collectivization (as did Chinese movies during the Cultural Revolution), family life, the emancipation of women, and the transformation of society into the new socialist ideal (Grgić, 2020). In the 1980s, the subject of these movies slowly became about impossible love and an individual lost in a strange reality (Bejko, 2016).

Williams (2020) defends the idea that communist-era movies were not as simple as the media claims today. According to him, Kinostudio was not a simple instrument of propaganda. The public denounced the Institute for Communist Crimes' ban proposal of the communist-era movies as propaganda movies which according to its director, Agron Tufa (2017), "keep alive and activate nostalgia for the dictatorship, doing great damage to public health". He claims that these productions affect mostly the younger generation which has not lived through the communist regime, which is also why the research question of this thesis will focus on young people as its target group. Albanian movie enthusiasts were not the only ones to disagree with the ban (although the opinion was divided) as Marc Cousins (2017), a movie critic at the Albanian Cinema Project, also said: "Films didn't commit the crimes of the Hoxha era. They are no better or worse than their times and they are evidence of what was thought and felt". During its existence between 1952 – 1992, Kinostudio produced 270 feature movies, 700 documentaries, and 150 animated movies (Grgić, 2020).

While Albanian movies have used all the propaganda techniques mentioned in the previous section of the study, they need to be commended because Albanian directors and writers did manage to produce quality work and leave behind a national culture, considering the difficult economic and political conditions of the time (Grgić, 2020). All Albanian movies are characterized by the "New Person", but one director whose works differ from the rest of the

Albanian movie makers is Xhanfise Keko. Keko still managed to produce her movies in line with the Communist Party's directives, but by specializing in children's movies, she found some room to challenge the times (Williams, 2013). Her characters who were children, were still devoted to the Party and were taught to sacrifice for socialism (Williams, 2013), but she still managed to rebel against gender inequality in the family (*When a Film Was Being Shot*), the privileged elite that had developed regardless the Party's claims on equality (*Spoiled Mimoza*), as well as separate children from the government. Hoxha's figure is still implied (Williams, 2013) but not present. Xhanfise Keko is the only female director in the history of Albanian cinematography and her contribution to gender issues and Albanian movies is immense.

In some research commissioned by the OSCE and conducted by IDRA, The Institute for Development Research and Alternatives, in 2015, researchers were able to shed some light on the understanding and perceptions of the communist past in Albania. Albanian citizens' responses varied on the variables studied, sometimes even according to age groups. For instance, the findings showed that young people know less about the features of Albanian communism compared to older groups and that school seems to have a limited role in teaching them about the communist past. On the other hand, television emerged as a dominant actor in teaching people about the former communist regime in Albania. Regarding the evaluation of communism itself, half of the people surveyed shared a good opinion of communism in Albania, but think that it lacked implementation. Compared to nowadays, the majority felt that aspects such as safety, education, and employment were better under the communist regime and lastly, the role of the former dictator Enver Hoxha was seen as positive in the history of the country by almost half the population. The sample consisted of 995 participants who also shared positive opinions on employment, the role of women in communist society, and political stability (OSCE, 2016). Needless to say, the findings are worth exploring and starting a conversation on what has now been established in the East as 'communist nostalgia'.

As Reksć (2015, p. 105) explained, "Nostalgia is a complex feeling and should not be simplified or reduced to irrational longing for the cruel system. Since nostalgia is moderated by wishes,

desires, and dreams, it tells us about the imperfections of the present reality.” The essay seeks to analyze the emotional attitude towards the communist past in Central and Eastern Europe, but it does not mean that we cannot make comparisons to Albania as well. Causes of communist nostalgia are the societal transformations that might not necessarily be perceived as the best, the fragmentation of family bonds, a longing for the old environment caused by mass migration, and the diminishing family traditions (Rekšć, 2015). What is worth pointing out, is that this longing for the past can also happen to people who were born in a different age and period. In Poland for example, a ‘culture of repetition’ is normal, which means that the communist past is being remembered through old movies or series on television (Kulminski, 2010). According to Velikonja (2008), this nostalgia is always present in countries that have experienced a social change, a transition, a transformation of their political regime, and a revolution. This kind of nostalgia is tied to the disappointment and dissatisfaction that comes with the present, especially to wishes and promises of a better future that end up being unfulfilled.

Albanian communist-era movies were and are still very popular among Chinese audiences, considering the movie exchange agreement with CCP during the Cultural Revolution (Berry et al., 2016), but due to the country’s long self-isolation period, they have only started to reach foreign audiences in recent years. Albanian movies were heavily filled with propaganda, as a means of introducing the communist ideology, and while major contributions have been made to the literature by authors such as Bruce Williams and Ana Grgić, there are currently no published works on the role that these movies play in the perceptions of their audience towards the communist regime in Albania. Taking into consideration also the findings published by OSCE in its 2016 report on the dominant role that television plays in teaching people about the Albanian communist past and the generally positive view of it, this study seeks to analyze how these movies shape the perceptions of young people in particular, who have not experienced the regime firsthand. The research question for my thesis is:

“How do Albanian communist-era movies shape the perceptions of people born after the fall of communism regarding the communist regime in Albania?”

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Rationale for research method

This exploratory research seeks to answer the following research question:

How do Albanian communist-era movies shape the perceptions of people born after the fall of communism regarding the communist regime in Albania?

To properly evaluate the perceptions of people born after the fall of the communist regime in Albania, a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources were used. For a more comprehensive understanding, three focus group discussions took place after the screening of three selected movies produced during the communist regime. Focus group discussions allowed the researcher to get a more in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions right after the exposure to the movies, making this method valuable for the study's purpose. Through this qualitative research method, the participants can participate in open and interactive discussions, interpret the movies and express their thoughts and emotions more freely, but at the same time, the researcher can have more material to analyze the topic, by also taking into consideration their personal experiences and stories, which are harder to collect through other methods. The sample selected for the screenings was purposeful to gather a variety of perspectives. The first group had entirely a background in Political Science, the second group were movie enthusiasts and the third group students were from different academic disciplines.

In addition to the qualitative approach, a mass survey was also used as it allows the researcher to have a bigger sample, but its target group was specifically respondents who had watched Albanian movies produced during the communist regime, to make sure that the data belongs to people who are familiar with the topic. The statistical data provided by the mass survey is much larger than the one gathered from the other research methods, including here the focus-group discussions, and it can also be used to spot trends and patterns and quantify the respondents' perceptions on the subject. Therefore, it serves as a great complementary source to the qualitative research method introduced above, as it offers a broader perspective of the general public and allows for generalizations about their perceptions. Both methods use data of the primary type and the descriptive nature, as they allow for a better understanding of the variables and their relationships. To have more flexibility in examining the rich data when answering the research question, this research does not use a hypothesis looking forward to the exciting insights and patterns that might come up and were initially not anticipated.

3.2. Empirical Data and Their Collection

3.2.1. Collecting data for the Qualitative Research

The first type of data collected was the qualitative type, for which, due to time and financial limitations, the participants in all three movie screenings were students of Epoka University. First, by reaching out to the students of the Department of Political Science directly, later by contacting the Head of the Movie Club, and finally by reaching out to the Student Council, several 40 participants in total were achieved: 16 students with a background in Political Science and 34 students with diverse backgrounds, such as Computers Sciences, Engineering, Business Administration and Architecture. The rationale behind this plethora of participants was to ensure a better representation of the population and to understand if the perceptions of students who have a background in Political Science and therefore, presumably, more information on the topic, differ from those whose knowledge is gained outside of school curricula, or might not

have any information at all. The movies screened were as follow: “The Lady from the Town” (1976) to the students of Political Science, “While Shooting a Film” (1981) to the cinephiles, and “Debatik” (1961) to the Student Council members, at the premises of Epoka University with the assistance of the Dean of Students Office.

The three works represent different thematics in the history of Albanian cinema. “Lady From The Town” (1976), except for being a public-favorite ever since its release, serves as a great representation of the ideals promoted from the Party in the 1970s on collectivization in the countryside, the working class, the transformations through which society was going through at the time, and which elevated Hoxha’s cult of personality even more, but with a likeable comedic touch. “While Shooting a Film” (1981) was specifically selected as it represents very well the social and political changes that took place in Albania in the 1980s, as well as places the “Socialist New Man” at the center of it, or better put, the “Socialist New Woman” as Liliana, Genci’s mother represents the empowerment of women during said period. Therefore, the movie is also known for its contribution to the discourse of gender issues and women’s rights in Albania. Lastly, “Debatik” represents the communist resistance against the Italian fascist occupation in the earliest period of the developing and fast-growing Albanian communist-era cinema. The content was purposefully selected as it depicts the idea of the socialist hero in the context of war and explicitly singles out the good and the evil, by using the character of Coli, whose background and ending can possibly generate empathy among the public. The decision to have these three movies was based purely on the aforementioned reasons, but had time permitted it, other movies could have complemented them perfectly.

At the beginning of each activity, an information sheet was distributed to all participants to ensure that everyone was properly and thoroughly informed on the aim of the study, the data collection process, the benefits, and risks of their participation, as well as the importance of their contribution of the research. Once the screening ended, a consent form was handed to each student to be signed, in case they wished and agreed to participate in the discussion. Out of the

16 students who watched “The Lady from the Town” (1976), only 14 of them signed the consent form and remained seated for the focus-group activity, but two of them did not participate in the discussion. As for the second screening “While Shooting a Film” (1981), all 10 students who signed the consent form remained and participated in the discussion. Lastly, because the number of participants for the screening of “Debatik” (1961) was the lowest among the three activities and consisted of only 8 people, it was also reflected in the number of people who participated in the discussion amounting to 6 in total. All participants have been guaranteed anonymity and the focus-group transcriptions have been altered in a way that does not give away the name of the speakers or their gender.

The data collection process for the qualitative part of the research will be explained and analyzed first because the movie screening took place on the university premises before the mass survey was distributed on online mediums. The population consists of Albanians who were born after the year 1990, the unofficial year of the fall of communism, as it is the year when pluralism was declared. To ensure the reliability of the information obtained, I have performed data triangulation by having participants of different backgrounds in the focus-group discussions, as well as by using a mass survey as a quantitative method, considering that their input might differ and provide a different set of data. To ensure the validity of the findings, I have shared the results of the qualitative research with the participants to ensure that it represents their thoughts as intended during the interview, but due to time constraints, this was not possible for the quantitative research. However, in perfect conditions, I would use the Test-Retest reliability method by administering the same survey at a different time.

According to Patton (2002), when having limited resources, purposeful sampling can be the most effective sampling technique used to extract rich information in qualitative research, and for this research, key groups of people were selected. This sampling strategy was able to offer the researcher the capacity to also compare the targeted groups regarding the research question. Because the students of the Department of Political Science and International Relations are more

knowledgeable about the area of interest to the research question, they were the first group invited to participate in the screenings, and therefore the focus-group discussion. Criterion one was used as a purposeful sampling strategy, because the participants were selected for the study based on their academic background, to see if it affects their perceptions on what the research question seeks to analyze, as well as their ability to articulate and convey their thoughts.

The same sampling technique was used for the other groups, with the second screening and focus-group discussion being open to cinephiles on campus, by establishing direct contact with the Movie Club. Similar to the first focus-group discussion, the language used was Albanian and had a duration of less than one hour, with the participants being selected due to their shared interest and passion for movies. Differently from the students of Political Science, this group was targeted to see if their opinions on the movie as a work of art would also have a direct impact on their feelings and perceptions towards the events depicted in the story set during the years of communism, and therefore communism itself. The thought process for the third screening did not differ from the first two as the sampling strategy was once again purposeful, but the criterion used was the diversity in the students' academic background. This criterion neither assumes that the participants have previous knowledge on the topic, neither denies it. Instead, it offers the researcher the opportunity to work with richer data.

One of the most important tasks for a qualitative researcher as is the case, is reflexivity as the data analyzed might be influenced by their underlying beliefs. In this study, the data has been collected using an audio recorder, while notes have been kept throughout all three focus-group discussions. While the information has not been transcribed immediately following the activities' conclusion, all possible gaps have been completed through the notes taken, the data has been analyzed several times using inductive coding, and the participants have been informed that the recordings will be deleted once the study has been completed. The research remains ethical to the end, by using the participants' information in such a way that does not alter its essence but ensures their anonymity.

3.2.2. Collecting Data for the Quantitative Research

The second type of data collected, was the quantitative one, by distributing a survey online, aiming to understand the general perceptions and opinions of people regarding the research question, while operating within time and financial constraints. This quantitative research does not use deductive reasoning to develop a hypothesis, but it does recognize the importance of operationalization and analyzes the following concepts: ‘Albanian communist-era movies’ as the cinematic works produced by the “New Albania” Studio between the years 1952 – 1990; ‘perception’ based on the Cambridge Dictionary’s definition (n.d.) as “a thought, belief, or opinion, often held by many people and based on appearances”, ‘people born after the fall of the communist regime in Albania in 1990, as the year when the Former President of Albania, Ramiz Alia, endorsed the establishment of a pluralist system; and lastly, ‘communist regime’ as the political regime in Albanian between 1946 – 1991.

Furthermore, the study relies heavily on the following variables which were incorporated into the survey and were used to collect the data:

- Quality of education is defined as a system that ensures “inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning for all” according to the United Nations definition (2015). This study, it is an analysis of whether the government was able to offer good education opportunities for everyone, despite of gender, location, economic or social status;
- Employment opportunities, specifically about the government providing employment opportunities based on people’s abilities, rather than their social status, economic incentives, family connections, etc. It also considers whether employment was guaranteed for all citizens;

- Gender equality, a variable referring to women's role in the communist Albanian society, as well as whether they had equal rights in employment, education, and other areas;
- Social ties, which in this study refer specifically to the interpersonal relationships between people, whether they were weak, strong, or latent based on the interactions people had with their community;
- Quality of life, referring to the standards of living, whether people felt equal to their counterparts, valued their community, the culture and the system in which they lived, whether they felt economically and physically secure, and whether their rights were protected;
- Politics is a variable that refers specifically to the conduct of the government, its policies, and more specifically its stability in providing for its citizens.

Lastly, to gather the data needed for the study, a combination of data collection questions has been used. The first questions introduced are the demographic ones so the researcher can determine whether the respondents are a representative sample of the target population and ascertain certain background characteristics such as the level and field of education, which can be used to understand if there is any correlation between the respondents' educational background and beliefs shared on the topic. The second type of questions used are the closed-ended ones which give the respondents several alternative answers for questions that don't need to be elaborated and do not influence them to provide a biased answer. The respondents can do that if they do not find themselves in the categories presented by answering the open-ended questions, or if they feel that they can expand a bit more on the understanding of the questions which while representing the aforementioned variables, have not been defined and leave room for interpretation. Scales are also used to see if there is any correlation between what the respondents think of the communist regime in Albania as a whole based on the cinematographic works they have watched and their responses later on, which are broken down in such a way that they can analyze all the variables mentioned above. All the questions, regardless of their type, are coherent and follow a clear logic by asking about general information before asking for variables directly related to the research question.

The group of people the researcher analyzes and draws conclusions from are Albanians who were born after 1990 as the year when pluralism was declared. The sample consists of friends, acquaintances, high school and university students, as well as graduates currently part of the workforce. The sampling method used for the survey is the snowball technique, considering that the survey was first shared with acquaintances and friends who fit the population criteria, who then shared it with their network, including several high schools and universities. The participants for the survey were selected based on non-random criteria, including people who were more accessible at the time of conducting the research.

Similar to the qualitative research presented earlier in the work, the risk of bias is present for the quantitative research as well. Two types of possible bias were identified: under-coverage bias and nonresponse bias. The first is due to technical constraints such as not being able to distribute the survey in high schools outside of Tirana, so the young people of the 15 – 18 age group might be inadequately represented, as well as the people with no or limited access to the internet considering that the survey was distributed through online channels only, using a link and a QR code. The second is related to several points of contact's unwillingness to participate in the study as well as to forward it to other people. Had the opportunity has been provided, the population would have been divided into smaller strata, the researcher would have used quota sampling, and would have shared the survey with as many people available.

3.3. Data Analysis

To make sense of the unstructured but rich data gathered from the focus group discussions, the research uses content analysis as the selected method, as it is the most suitable for identifying patterns in recorded communication such as transcripts of focus group discussions. In this case, it is qualitative as it is focused on interpreting and understanding rather than quantifying

the participants' opinions. After defining the objective of the research work, an inductive approach was used to come up with codes that represent the data as accurately as possible and from the analysis, eight representative themes were identified: feelings, knowledge, propaganda, and opinions. Separate codes were assigned to each of the themes such as the feelings produced by the movie screened, knowledge from the experience and stories of family members and acquaintances, knowledge from other sources, propaganda elements used in the movie screened, propaganda elements used in other movies, opinions on the movie itself, whether the movie portrays communism realistically or fully, opinions on the communist regime in Albania based on the movie watched, and opinions on the communist regime in Albania based on other sources.

Table 1.1

Coding System for Qualitative Analysis

Codes	Categories	Themes
A1	The feelings produced by the movie.	Feelings
B1	Knowledge from the experience and stories of family members and acquaintances.	knowledge of the regime
D2	Whether the movie portrays communism realistically or fully.	Opinions
D1	Opinions on the movie itself.	Opinions
C1	Propaganda elements used in the movie.	Propaganda
D4	Opinions on the communist regime in Albania based on other sources.	Opinions
B2	Knowledge from other sources.	knowledge of the regime
C2	Propaganda elements used in other movies.	Propaganda
D3	Opinions on the communist regime in Albania based on the movie watched.	Opinions

Each of the four aforementioned themes is represented in the transcribed focus-group discussions by their separate coding, which are marked by different descriptions and are illustrated through various quotations throughout the text. Furthermore, each quotation is matched to the respective participant to analyze if the comments falling under the same theme

belong to different participants, or were voiced by the same one and to make the analysis as accurate as possible, for all three separate screenings. Some examples that were identified and used for the analysis are ones like "...it seems like it's sugarcoating that period a lot" falling under the category of 'Whether the movie portrays communism realistically or fully', or "If you see the Italian characters in this movie, they were hanging out and eating out in restaurants, you could easily tell the difference between them", referring to the way Albanian characters and foreigners were portrayed in one of the movies and falling under the category of 'Propaganda elements used in the movie'. All three transcripts can be found in the Appendix and the results of their analysis will be presented in the following section.

As for the analysis of the quantitative data gathered through the administration of the mass survey, a thorough clean-up of the information received has been performed, as people older than the age of 33 which serves as the age limit for the sample have also responded to the questions. While their responses will not be taken into account when answering the research question, they will be analyzed separately to offer some additional insight for a different category of people and use the data to its full potential. At the same time, because all participants in the focus-group discussions completed the survey before the movie screenings so the researcher could draw comparisons between the opinions shared before and after watching the movie, their data will be analyzed as part of the whole survey, as well as separately.

4. RESULTS

4.1. The Lady from the Town

Analyzing qualitative data is probably one of the hardest tasks for a researcher, as categorizing the participants' thoughts and feelings can often feel challenging and overwhelming. To remain as truthful to their statements as possible, this section will focus on presenting the results for all three screenings separately before concluding all the qualitative data gathered. The results were analyzed based on the themes and categories presented beforehand, aiming to answer the research question "How do Albanian communist-era movies shape the perceptions of people born after the fall of communism regarding the communist regime in Albania?" While the themes and categories under which the analysis was performed remain the same for all three, it is important to note that the three movies belong to different genres and were produced in different periods during the communist regime.

"The Lady from the Town" was produced and directed by Piro Milkani in 1976 and remains popular to this day due to its comical portrayal of social, cultural, and political themes of the time. The movie tells the story of Ollga, a lady from the city who moves to the village with her daughter Meli once she finishes her studies. Meli becomes a doctor's assistant and is assigned her position by the Party, while Ollga tries to comically arrange a job for her daughter in the city and find her a husband, feeling a sense of superiority towards the villagers and doing her best to escape any situations that might keep her there permanently, often leading to awkward and funny scenes.

The engaging storyline, the actors' performances, and the comedic elements in the movie easily become a source of entertainment and curiosity for the audience, which is also evident in the participants' responses after the screening on campus, according to whom, the movie did not necessarily generate bad feelings, and "Participant 1" even stated "...it evoked a certain nostalgia in us". It is important to highlight that while the feelings generated by the movie were positive, the personal experiences and stories told by the participant's family members and acquaintances also played a great role in how they viewed the communist regime, often comparing what they saw in the movie to these personal accounts.

In general, the participants' understanding of the historical context seemed to be considerably affected by these personal experiences, highlighting the economic hardships of the time, with people in rural areas living in poorer conditions than those in urban areas, for instance. "Participant 2" is quoted saying "My dad grew up in the North and all my life I grew up with his stories on how during communism there were very big discrepancies in terms of poverty between people who lived in the city and those who lived in the countryside. And because they were living in very extreme and poor conditions, nobody was happy". Other experiences such as lack of personal freedom or the restriction in mobility were also mentioned, as well as food shortages or internment. However, as the participants are students of Political Science, they also shared their thoughts based on other sources such as reports or even the state archive, which are the same as the ones based on shared personal experiences.

The participants were also quick to point out several propaganda elements used in the movie such as the glorification of agricultural work in the summer heat which according to them was not as positive as its portrayal made it out. Posters with slogans such as "Glory to the Albanian Labor Party" were also identified, as well as the main character's strong alignment with the Party. However, the participants drew attention mostly to the movie's emphasis on the community and collective action, which according to them was to convince the audience that

there was a strong sense of unity during the communist years. To quote “Participant 1”: “The movie was mostly focused on the community part, on how they did everything together.” The prosperous image of having plenty to eat and share was also singled out, later to be debunked by sharing accounts of their family members. According to “Participant 8”, some of the same propaganda elements are used also in other Albanian movies produced during the communist regime, although no names were mentioned.

Negative aspects of the communist regime were not the only ones recognized, as contrasting perspectives were presented based on the knowledge that the participants had. While “Participant 4” pointed out the seizure of private property and wealth, “Participant 8” mentioned the feelings of fear and insecurity associated with the regime, and “Participant 7” claimed that the system was imposed and was not necessarily desired by people. However, some participants shared a positive view of the shared community such as “Participant 1”, according to whom the regime nurtured a sense of community and support that typically cannot be found in individualism. Some of these are elements portrayed in the movie “The Lady from the Town”, so when the participants were asked if they thought the movie portrayed the regime realistically or fully, they responded negatively.

Illustrated also by the examples mentioned above, several reasons were stated, one of them being the missing information, by “Participant 1” claiming that “...there is other information that is not fully portrayed here”. “Participant 2,” thinks that the movie sugar-coats and presents an idealized view of the communist period, while there seemed to be a consensus on the contrasting images between what is portrayed in the movies and the real-life experiences of the people who lived during that period. Furthermore, “Participant 8” used scenes in the movie such as the cutting up of a watermelon into equal pieces to be offered to the guests, to express what they see as a distortion of the reality of the time, presented as equal rationing of resources. In general, the movie is viewed as a means of propaganda that not only does not portray communism realistically, but also fails to address the negative aspects of the time.

And lastly, to analyze the question related more to the study's aim, what is the participants' opinion on the communist regime based on the "Lady From the Town", overall, they shared that what they see in the movie is a much better image of what they know of communism in Albania, and "Participant 10" even explicitly said, "If I had only watched the movie and didn't have any other information, I would say that life was very beautiful back then and that those people are very happy, even happier than today." In a similar fashion to the aforementioned topics, "Participant 4" for instance acknowledged that they do think more positively of certain aspects such as the connectedness between people and the stronger social bonds, the appreciation and dedication shown by the former regime to the environment, as well as women empowerment and the transformation of gender roles. Negative opinions were also shared, such as the depiction of the division between people living in rural and urban areas by "Participant 9" and "Participant 2" and the privileges gained through one's professional background, but these opinions were in the minority.

4.2. While Shooting a Film

"While Shooting a Film" was produced in 1981 and remains one of the most important works of Xhanfise Keko, whose unique position as the only woman director at the time in the country, is cemented in history. As she has dedicated her life to working with children, this movie is also centered around Genci and his troubled family life while his parents are in the process of being separated. One of the main characters also represents Keko, the female assistant director who befriends Genci and helps him navigate the heavy emotions of a broken home. The movie is also heavy in propagandistic elements, representing very well the ideals of the Socialist New Man.

Because of its social character, the movie sparked a lot of discussion among the audience, even eliciting nostalgic feelings among them as expressed by “Participant 4” who said: “The feeling I get from the movie we just watched, but also based on other movies I’ve had the chance to watch, is nostalgia and strangely enough, nostalgia for a period we have not even lived”. However, despite not living through the regime themselves, the participants seemed to be informed on the historical context of the movie regardless of their different academic backgrounds, and the reason for participating mostly was due to their interest in cinematic works. They were able to express a different range of opinions and share personal experiences of their acquaintances and family members during the communist regime in Albania, while also having information based on other sources such as documentaries. It is because of this information and the good understanding of the period that they showed surprise in some of the scenes shown in the movie, such as the nice hotel, or the abundance of food, which showcased a level of prosperity and well-being that were different to the stories their family members had shared.

Something interesting about this discussion was that the participants were constantly reflecting on the discrepancies between these stories and what they saw in the movie, acknowledging that these perspectives might have been influenced by their family members’ personal experiences, and while some of them might have had a hard time during the communist regime, others had not. Such was the case of “Participant 3” who is quoted saying “...I just think it’s worth seeing it from all perspectives. My grandfather from my mom’s side used to be an officer and he has no complaints about the communist period. He didn’t use to get upset or stressed like he does today”. This statement brings the participant’s experience closer to the content of the movie, rather than the documentaries they have watched.

As on the first screening, the participants for “While Shooting a Film” were quick to note their observations on the propaganda elements used, which while not being heavily emphasized, were still according to them, promoting the love and obedience for the Party. “Participant 6”

highlighted a scene in the movie in which despite being focused on women's independence and her success in the workplace, she still said that she would work for the state, representing a commitment to the regime at the time. These attempts in the movie were perceived by the participants as a false narrative to bring the general population into submission. Most importantly, they heavily emphasized the movie's efforts to serve the audience a prosperous image of communist Albania at the time, which "Participant 1" illustrated with the beautiful outfits used by the actors and the extras, leading them to believe that a considerable investment had been made to cover the economic reality of the time.

It is worth pointing out once again, that because the participants were members of the Movie Club at the university, and some of them even had previous acting experience such as "Participant 1", they were also eager to share their opinions on the movie's artistic values beyond the propaganda elements highlighted previously, as well as its execution. These opinions varied, with some members of the audience like "Participant 3" finding that the movie had no clear message, but "Participant 1" expressing admiration at the work put into the movie and the organic performances of the actors, regardless of the lack of proper equipment and conditions at the time. However, all of them believed that there were some discrepancies between the events portrayed in the movie and the knowledge they had of the historical period conveyed by their family members. In general, the movie was met with skepticism when it comes to its portrayal of reality.

Nevertheless, the participants admitted that their previous knowledge of the communist regime in Albania swayed their take on the movie, by claiming that even though they appreciated the artistic work and effort put in it and enjoyed elements such as the representation of women empowerment, it did not change their already existing opinion on the regime. Their perspectives varied because of the experiences shared by their family members, who regardless of feelings of nostalgia for the regime or the positive memories associated with the shared community, according to the participants, had also conveyed the negative elements linked to it. At the end

of the focus-group discussion, the participants expressed their feelings of gratitude for not living in the same regime and being able to think more critically and individually.

4.3. Debatik

The events of “Debatik”, produced in 1961 and directed by Hysen Hakani, are different from the first two movies set in the ‘40s. The movie is centered around a group of children who form an organization called “DEBATIK”, aiming to fight the fascist occupation of Albania at the time. The story starts and ends with Coli, an orphan boy who seeks membership in the organization and commits himself to help the partisans. Ultimately, he is killed while helping his communist teacher in the fight against fascism, standing in for the partisan heroism of the time. The movie does not necessarily stand out among the rest of productions representing the communist resistance against the Italian fascist occupation, but the main character’s background as storyline brings the message closer to the audience.

“Debatik” is supposed to help build a sense of national identity, even by using characters as young as Coli, who despite his age represents Albania’s liberation war efforts. Because of the complexity of the historical period represented in the movie, the participants often expressed their confusion at understanding the plot, as a good historical background is necessary to facilitate that. Additionally, “Participant 1,” said, “In the end, I couldn’t understand what they achieved with that movie even back in those days.” Because this group of participants did not have a background in Political Science, their knowledge seemed to be based on previous history classes back in school, or personal accounts shared by their family members as indicated by “Participant 2” and “Participant 3”.

“Participant 6” mentioned having watched the movie previously with their father, whose accounts of the war based on family history, did not match what is depicted in the movie and

claimed that their knowledge of the war has also evolved with time, despite enjoying the movies as a kid and not thinking much about the message behind it. The participants then went on to share other personal stories from their family members, that while not necessarily related to the historical events portrayed in the movie, were related to the communist regime directly, under which the movie was produced. Specifically, “Participant 2” highlighted the exaggerated achievements presented by the former regime, which cultivated a false narrative, deepening the disparity between the personal accounts and the events depicted in the movies produced under the communist regime.

On account of this knowledge, the participants were able to discern several propaganda elements in the movie, such as the difference in shots between the heroic locals and the foreigners. As “Participant 6” and “Participant 1” pointed out, the foreigners were portrayed as the bourgeoisie, well-dressed, eating out at restaurants, repulsed at the sight of simple things such as turtles, and overall, living different lives from the local people who were preoccupied with the liberation of the country. “Participant 6” even brought up other movies as similar examples of propaganda, that instead sought to glamorize life under the communist regime itself, such as “The Lady from the Town” and “Taulant Wants a Sister”. “Participant 1” supports the comment by mentioning a scene in which the main character claims to be the son of the State, suggesting that the communist regime was indoctrinating their citizens. All in all, the participants were very straightforward in their opinions, claiming that the movie was used for propaganda purposes and did not portray the events of the time fully or realistically.

“Participant 3” stated “...the movie stands for something else. They did not intend to portray everything as it happened, they had something else in mind” suggesting that the movie was pushing a certain agenda, instead of accurately representing the war period. “Participant 3” suggested that the movie’s goal according to them was simply to promote a feeling of patriotism and loyalty to the Motherland, which in the long term also served the communist agenda. The participants used the characters in the movie, such as the former headmaster of the school who was discharged and replaced with a fascist-backed new headmaster, to

illustrate the distortion of experiences during the historical period. According to “Participant 1”, while there were people who fostered a love for the country, they did not encourage kids to pick up arms and fight for the country. Additionally, “Participant 2” even speculated that the movie was intentionally harsh in its depiction of the events to have people feel more grateful for what they now had during communism.

Finally, when asked about their opinions on the communist regime based on the movies that they have watched and the one that was screened before the focus-group discussion, in general, it seems like they did not play a role in their perceptions. The participants claimed that they have been exposed to Albanian communist-era movies since their childhood, implying that they did not understand the propagandistic messages at the time, so simply judged them for their artistic values. Some participants hold strongly to their negative feelings about the regime, denouncing it even though some of the people in the room stated that they wished the events depicted in the movies were true. To conclude, the participants’ perception of the communist regime is not directly linked to the movies they have watched, but it is important to remind the reader that a larger sample would provide a more comprehensive set of data and further analysis is needed.

4.4. Survey

Out of 536 respondents who completed the survey, 35 participants (6.53%) were excluded from the results for not meeting the study criteria, as they were either above the age of 33 years old, or had not previously watched any Albanian movies, and therefore were unable to continue with the second part of the survey, which was crucial to answering the research question. The final number of respondents resulted in 501, with 63 of them answering the survey questions before the screenings of the movies at the premises of Epoka University. Their responses will also be analyzed separately, in addition to the total number of valid responses from the survey, in order to compare the results before the participants had watched one of the movies and after.

Prior to analyzing the variables in the survey, answering the data collection questions, and therefore the research question itself, this section will put forward a quick overview of the sample demographics, such as gender, age, and education. These descriptive statistics seek to offer some insight into the data characteristics, which will be important in interpreting the data later on. In this case, this research will only measure the frequency distribution and the central tendency of the following nominal data such as the gender the respondents identify with and their academic background, the ordinal data such as their educational data, and the ordinal data such as their age. The rest of the questions in the survey belong to the ordinal and qualitative types and will be presented later in more in-depth.

As illustrated in Table 2.1, the frequency distribution of gender as a variable shows that a considerable number of the respondents identify as girls or women (73.3%), followed by an additional 25.1% who identify as boys or men. At the same time, 1.6% preferred not to disclose their gender by selecting the “Prefer not to answer” option. When it comes to their academic background, as seen in Table 2.2, there is a clear majority of respondents who have a background in Engineering and Technology representing 24.55% of the sample, followed by those who have a background in Business and Administration degrees, specifically 21.4%. Another predominant category is that of General Education, which encompasses individuals who have still yet to enter university and only obtain a middle-school or high-school diploma. These are just a few examples among a diversity of academic backgrounds, which will be useful later on to analyze any potential correlation between the respondents’ answers to the data collection questions and their educational profiles.

Table 2.1

Frequency Distribution Table Showing Gender

Gender	Simple Frequency Distribution	Percentage Frequency Distribution
Girl/Woman	367	73.3%
Boy/Man	126	25.1%
Prefer not to answer	8	1.6%

Table 2.2

Frequency Distribution Table Showing Academic Background

Academic Background	Simple Frequency Distribution	Percentage Frequency Distribution
Business and Administration	107	21.4%
Education	8	1.60%
Engineering and Technology	123	24.55%
Fine Arts and Design	7	1.40%
Health and Medicine	49	9.78%
Humanities and Social Science	3	0.60%
Humanities and Social Sciences	17	3.39%
General Education	81	16.17%
Law	39	7.78%
Literature and Language Studies	13	2.59%
Natural Sciences	6	1.20%
No Response	6	1.20%
Physical Education and Sports	2	0.40%
Political Science	39	7.78%
Food Science and Technology	1	0.20%

For the respondents' age, measures of central tendency have been used, such as the mean, the mode, and the range. In this study, the minimum age is 12 years old, and the maximum age that

of 33. Therefore, the range in the dataset is 21. Meanwhile, the average age of the respondents is 23 years old, while the mode is 17, suggesting that the most common age in the sample is 17 years old. In regards to the level of education that the respondents obtain, the most predominant one is a Bachelor's Degree, with 44% of the participants enrolled in one of its programs, followed by 33% of the participants who either have a Master's Degree or are currently studying for one. Secondary school is the least represented with 1% of the entire sample.

The following results belong to ordinal data and are concerned with the respondents' opinions on the economic, political, and social aspects of the communist regime. In order to understand if their perceptions are not tied to the communist-era movies that they have watched, the questions have been offered in two different sections: first unrelated to the communist-era cinematography, and then directly linked to the Albanian movies produced during the communist regime. In order to offer the participants several possible answers to choose from, ordinal variables were considered the most appropriate and they were analyzed using the frequency distribution. Inferential statistics were not necessary in this case, as the research does not test a hypothesis, but is simply concerned with collecting the respondents' thoughts and making sense of them.

Firstly, before delving into more research question-specific information, the respondents were asked about their knowledge level of the communist past in Albania. As shown in Figure 1.1, the majority (65.7%) shared that they were mostly informed, with only a minority (0.8%) indicating that they were not at all informed. A considerable number of people (15.2%) stated that they were very informed, and only a small percentage (4.2%) claimed to be mostly uninformed. A notable portion (13.82%) conveyed that they were uncertain about their level of knowledge so they preferred not to select any of the aforementioned options.

At the same time, the respondents also evaluated life during the communist regime, comparing the economic, social, and political aspects to the present. When it comes to the economy, as indicated in Figure 1.2, a considerable number (44.7%) thought that it was much worse during the communist regime, followed by a slightly similar percentage (41.9%) who considered it simply worse. Socially wise, illustrated also in Figure 1.3, a substantial number of respondents (34.1%) evaluated life as worse during the communist years, but 18.6% thought it was better. Regarding politics, as shown in Figure 1.4, the trend was similar, with the majority (49.9%) deeming life under the communist regime as much worse compared to 8.8% who considered it better.

Figure 1.1

The participants' level of information on the communist past in Albania.

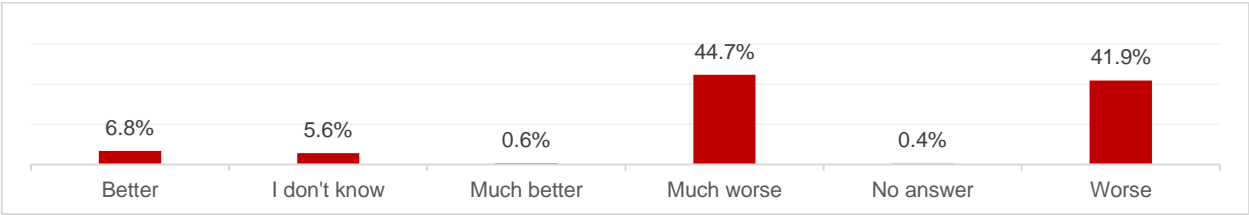


Figure 1.2

The evaluation of life during the communist regime, economically-wise, compared to nowadays.

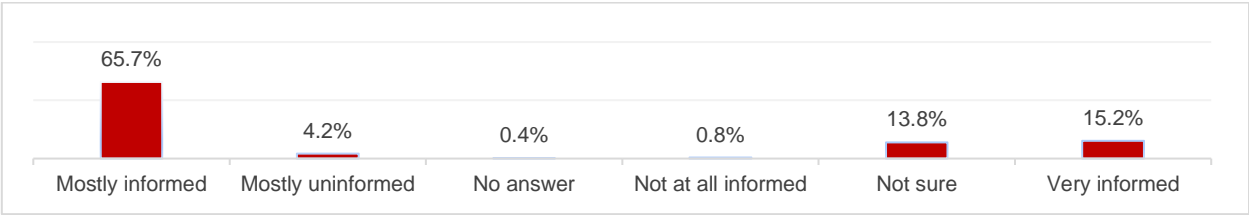


Figure 1.3

The evaluation of life during the communist regime, socially-wise, compared to nowadays.

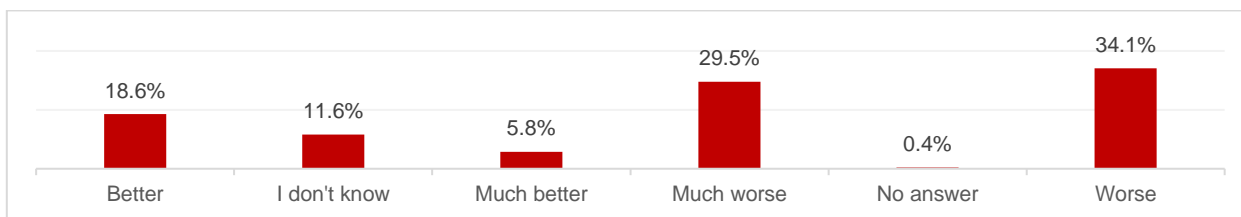
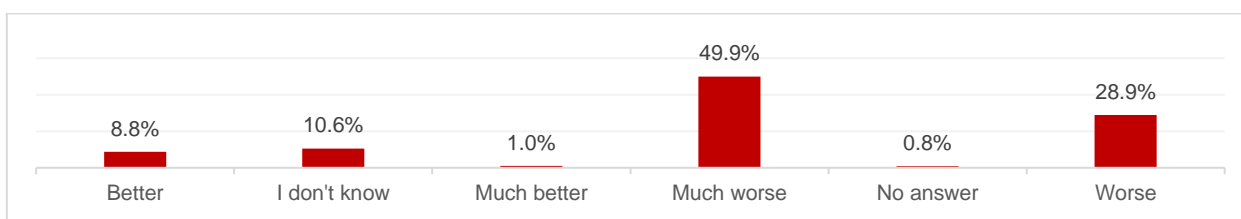


Figure 1.4

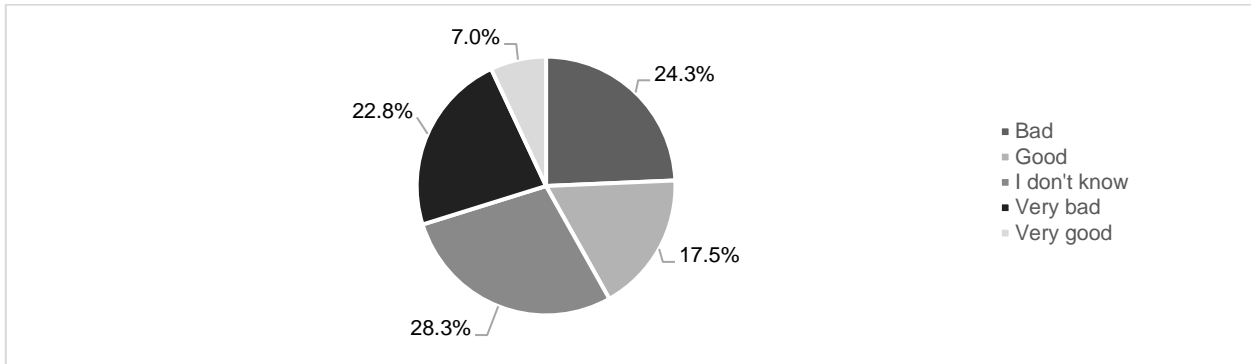
The evaluation of life during the communist regime, politically-wise, compared to nowadays.



To continue with the rest of the survey questions, the participants were asked if they had watched any Albanian movies produced during the communist regime, and therefore, only the responses of those who answered positively were considered valid and will be presented as follows. These results are especially important to the study as they are directly linked to the research question by analyzing the perceptions of the participants on various aspects of the communist regime, based on the movies they have watched. Accordingly, illustrated also in Figure 1.5, the majority of the respondents (28.3%) felt unsure about how to evaluate the regime based on its movie productions, followed by a percentage of 22.8% who viewed it in a very bad light. Some of the respondents, however, had more positive feelings as 17.5% of them saw it as a good thing, followed by a minority of 7% who saw it as a very good thing. The remaining 24.3% had a negative opinion of it.

Figure 1.5

The evaluation of the communist regime in Albania based on the movies watched.



Each of the variables introduced in the methodology section was also analyzed separately, so when it comes to how the respondents evaluate the education system based on how it is portrayed in the communist-era movies that they have watched, a considerable number (39.2%) stated that it was better, while 4.4% deemed it as much worst, exhibited also in Figure 1.6. The respondents were at the same time asked about the meritocracy at work and the majority of them (35.6%) evaluated it as higher during the communist regime, with the smallest percentage (7.2%) being those who considered it much lower, results which are represented in Figure 1.7. In terms of the role women played in society, the results are conveyed in Figure 1.8, with 42% seeing it as weaker than it is today, but there was still a small percentage of 4.2% who considered it as much more empowered.

Figure 1.6

The evaluation of the education system based on the movies watched compared to today.

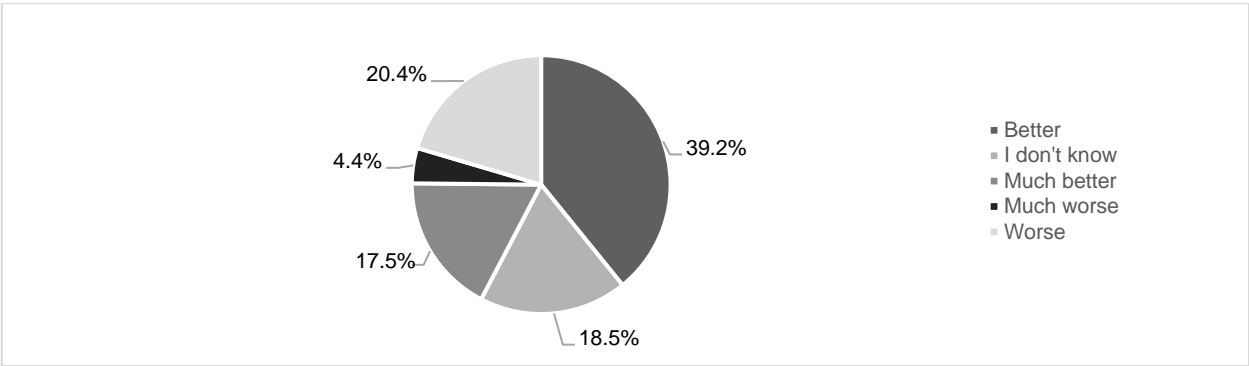


Figure 1.7

The evaluation of meritocracy at work based on the movie watched compared to today.

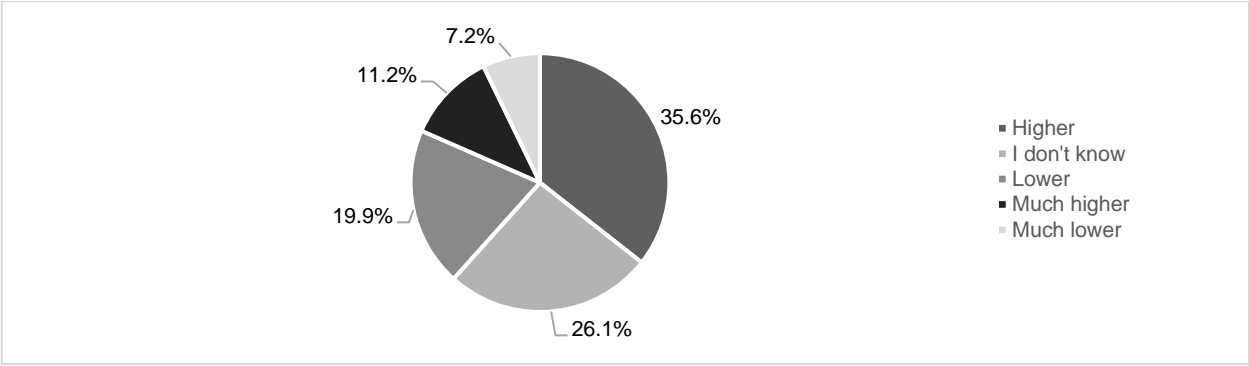
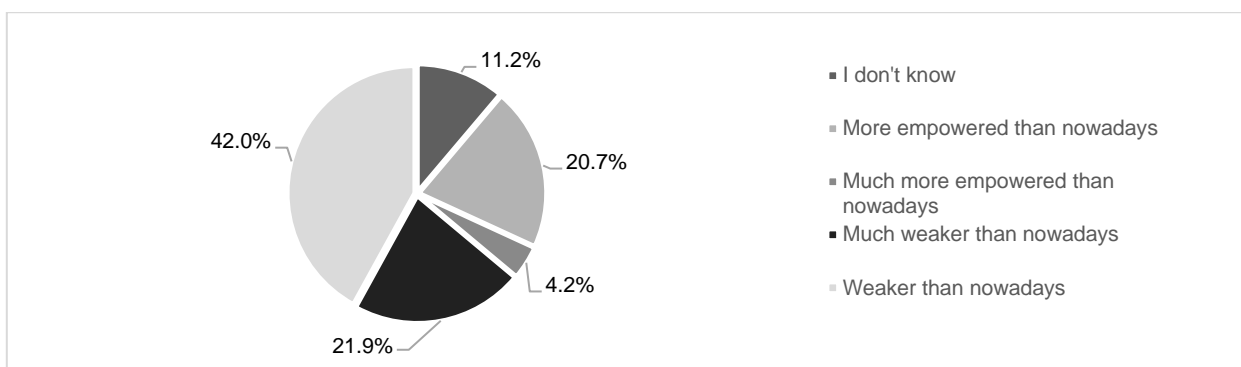


Figure 1.8

The evaluation of the role of women based on the movies watched compared to today.



Regarding social ties during the communist years, illustrated in Figure 1.9, 46.4% of the participants claimed that they viewed them as much stronger than nowadays, based on the movies they've watched, while 11.9% considered them much weaker. The results for the respondents' evaluation of the political regime, indicated in Figure 1.11, show that the majority of the participants 44.6% stated that back then it was more stable, with the lowest percentage (5.3%) seeing it as less stable. When it comes to evaluating the living standards according to the Albanian communist cinematography, 43.1% of the participants shared that there was more equality during those years, but 4.2% see them as the same as the living standards today. The results for this variable are illustrated in Figure 1.10. Finally, when it comes to evaluating whether the movies portray the reality of living during the communist regime as it was, presented in Figure 1.12, 42.7% responded negatively, followed by those who said that they did.

Figure 1.9

The evaluation of social ties based on the movies watched compared to today.

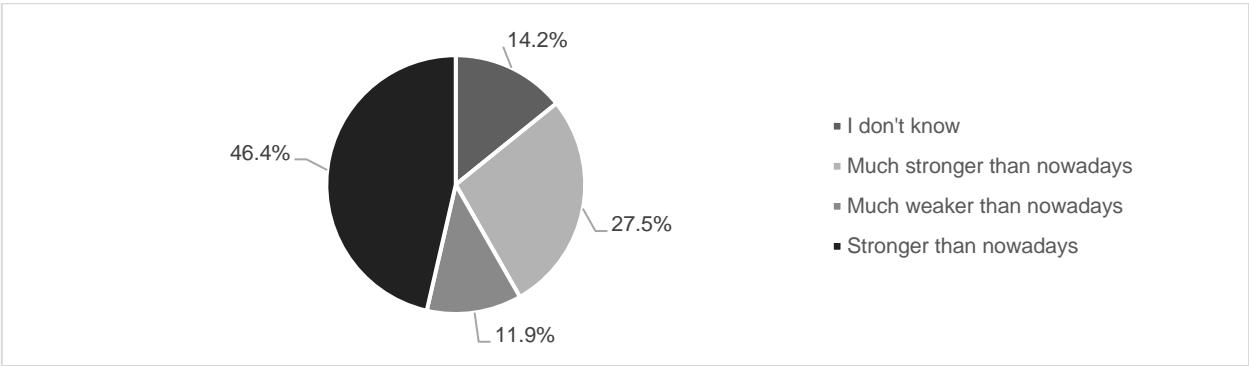


Figure 1.10

The evaluation of the living standards based on the movies watched compared to today.

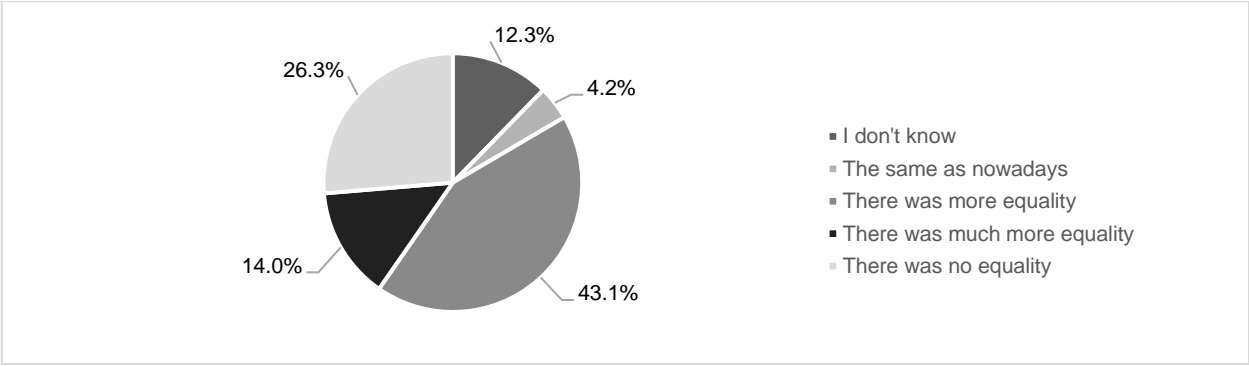


Figure 1.11

The evaluation of the political regime based on the movies watched compared to today.

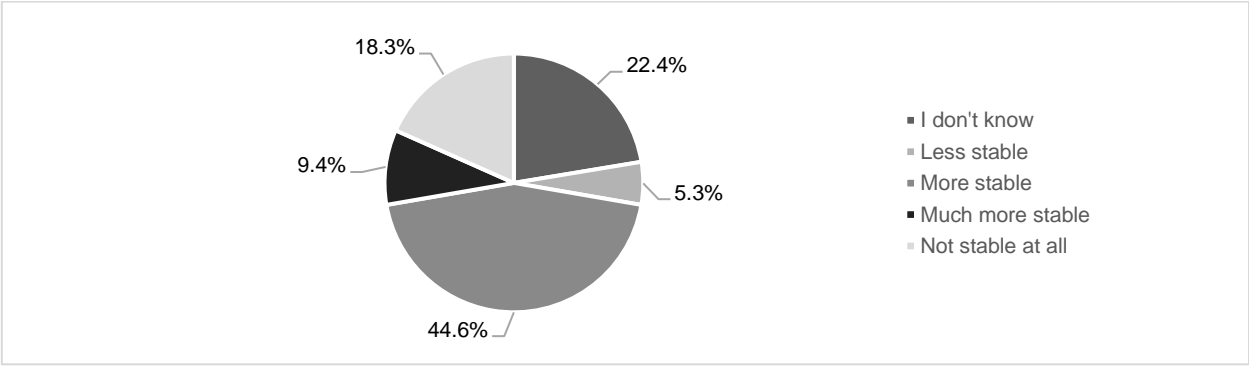
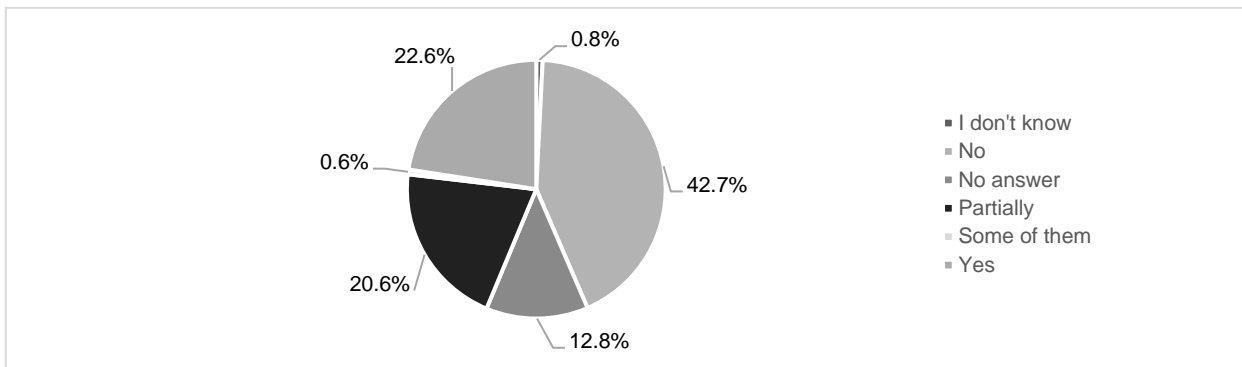


Figure 1.12

The evaluation of whether communist-era movies portray the reality of the time.



As mentioned earlier, the responses of those who participated in the screenings were also analyzed separately to offer some sort of comparison in the discussion section between the results concluded from the qualitative analysis and the quantitative one. However, should the answers differ before and after the screenings, it is important to emphasize that there is no way to prove that the change is directly caused by the movie screened, especially because not all those who watched the movie remained for the focus-group discussion, so it is difficult to point out if the change in perceptions belongs to the same students.

Regardless of being students of Political Science, 6.3% of those who watched the first movie “The Lady from the Town” responded that they were not at all informed about the communist past in Albania, but the majority consisting of 56.3% stated that they were mostly informed. Out of all the students who participated in the screening, only one had not previously watched any Albanian movies, so the following statistics represent only those who responded to the second section of the survey. The majority saw the communist regime in a bad light based on those movies, comprising 35.7% of the participants, but when it comes to social ties, a considerable percentage 35.7 considered them stronger than nowadays. In terms of the education system, 38.5% of them valued it as worse, and they had a similar opinion on meritocracy at work, with

35.7% evaluating it worse. The opinion however was divided when evaluating the living standards, as an equal number of people claimed that there was no equality and that there was more equality (42.9% for each). 35.7% did not see the political regime as stable at all and 35.7% thought that women had a weaker role in the communist society. When asked if these movies portrayed the communist regime realistically, the majority (43.8%) replied firmly that they did not.

When it comes to the second group who watched “While Shooting a Film”, the majority of them (81.3%) felt informed about the communist past in Albania, but their opinions on evaluating the regime were mixed, with 50% of the respondents expressing uncertainty based on the movies that they had watched. More specifically, 57.1% of them viewed the political regime as more stable than nowadays, and the same number perceived the social ties as stronger in the past. On the education system, their opinions varied with 35.7% saying that it used to be better, but another 35.7% claimed that they did not know. A considerable number of the respondents (64.3%) also viewed the role of women in society as weaker and 57.1% responded uncertainly about meritocracy at work. Overall, a good portion of respondents (37.5%) did not believe that the reality of living under the communist regime in Albania is depicted accurately in these movies.

Finally, as far as the third group of participants is concerned, the opinions are less diverse considering that only 7 people attended the screening of “Debatik”, but it is important to highlight the fact that due to their diversity in academic backgrounds, only 57.1% of the respondents stated that they were mostly informed on the communist past in Albania. When they were asked their opinion based on the movies they had watched, a considerable percentage of 42.9% saw it as very bad, but the same portion admitted that according to what they had watched in the communist-era movies, social ties were stronger than nowadays. 57.1% of the respondents also evaluated the education system as better but were divided in their opinion on the living standards, with 42.9% saying that there was no equality, and another 42.9% saying that there was more equality than nowadays. In terms of meritocracy at work, 42.9% were unsure

about their opinion and the same number of people saw the political regime during the communist years as less stable. Regarding the role of women in society, a considerable percentage of 57.1% said it was much weaker, and finally, overall, they believed that the communist-era movies either portrayed reality partially or did not at all (42.9% each).

At the end of the survey, the respondents were also presented with a qualitative question, which offered them the opportunity to explain their answers to the closed-ended questions at more length or offer their thoughts on the topic more in-depth, in case they felt limited by the survey to that point. Out of 501 respondents, only 43 had more comments on the topic, with the general sentiment being that the communist-era movies were valuable in artistic terms and an important part of Albanian heritage, but that they did not portray the communist regime realistically. The participants commented that they saw them as propaganda tools, based on the stories that they have heard from their family members or acquaintances who lived through the regime. At the same time, some of the respondents also used this space in the survey to criticize the communist regime as well as the current one, often blaming it for the current situation.

Lastly, this research also used a control group in its research methodology, consisting of all those respondents who had not watched any communist-era movies before completing the survey, and therefore, were unable to respond to all the movie-related questions. A comparative analysis will be conducted between the two in the discussion section to determine whether there are any notable differences between the responses of those who have watched the movies and those who have not. When asked how informed they were on the communist past in Albania, most of them (58.62%) answered that they were mostly informed and only 17.24% claimed that they were mostly uninformed. They also shared that the quality of life social-wise and politically-wise was worse (48.28% and 35.71% respectively) and in economic terms, a considerable percentage of 44.83% argued that it was much worse.

5. DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to analyze the impact of Albanian communist-era movies and answer the research question “How do Albanian communist-era movies shape the perceptions of people born after the fall of communism regarding the communist regime in Albania?” By looking into the qualitative and quantitative data gathered as presented in the aforementioned sections, we identified the connections between the participants’ and respondents’ answers and their perceptions to provide some insight into their role in the understanding of the communist regime in Albania. This analysis is presented by taking note of the existing literature introduced at the beginning of this study, examining if it has any implications for our research, drawing comparisons between the research’s findings and what the literature suggests, as well as aiming to answer the research question that guides the work.

Provided that the qualitative analysis differs from the quantitative one in terms of the methodological techniques used, its focus and depth, and its distinct format, it was considered more reasonable to perform the qualitative analysis of the three focus-group discussions first and then integrate the findings with the quantitative analysis to receive a better understanding of the topic and the research question. Findings show that movies generate positive feelings and even provoke a certain nostalgia among the participants, indicating that they do have some influence on the perceptions of the audience. However, the participants expressed high levels of skepticism towards all three movies, suggesting that they are aware of their propagandistic aim and elements and the fact that certain historical events were not portrayed accurately. Personal accounts of their family members and other sources of information played a crucial role and were much more significant in their perceptions of the regime than movies did. For that reason,

while communist-era movies do play a role in shaping these perceptions, they are not a major factor and do not determine the views of young people on the communist regime in Albania.

The aforementioned result is reasonable considering that previously to watching the movies, the majority of the participants in all the screenings responded that they were mostly informed on the communist regime in Albania, regardless of their background, and in all three cases when asked about the economic, political and social aspect of the regime in general, they all shared that they saw them negatively. However, it's important to highlight, then when they were asked about their opinion based on the movies they had previously watched, their opinions differed based on their academic background, as the major part of the students of Political Science saw all aspects of the communist regime negatively, except for the social ties which they considered as stronger and the living standards, based on which, an equal number of people responded that there was more equality to those who said that there was no equality.

Those participants in the screenings who came from different academic backgrounds or joined because of their shared passion for movies, were a bit more diverse in their answers, often expressing uncertainty when asked about individual aspects of the regime, or expressing more positive feelings towards elements such as social ties, the education system, the equality in living standards, and the stability of the political regime. However, it is important to emphasize again that it is difficult to find a direct correlation between their responses before the movie and after, as there were more participants in the screenings than there were in the discussions, albeit the difference was not that considerable. When analyzing the qualitative data gathered through the focus group, the conclusion is the same: movies do contribute to shaping the participants' perceptions as they elicit feelings of nostalgia or generate positive feelings towards certain elements shown in the movies, but other factors play a bigger role. The negative feelings generated by the movies could also be generated by the type of the movie, as some participants, for instance, did not enjoy watching "Debatik". As supported by the Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (Green and Brock, 2021) introduced in the literature review section, this

could be one of the cases in which the perceptions of the audience are affected by how appealing they consider the storyline.

Concerning the quantitative data gathered through the mass survey, when it comes to the awareness about the communist regime in Albania, the majority of the respondents claimed that they had a certain level of knowledge about it, but their opinions on how they perceived it were mixed. In all three dimensions introduced at the beginning of the survey (the economic, the political, and the social), they believed that it was worse, with only small percentages considering them better. When asked about their overall perception concerning the movies watched, the result was slightly different as the majority expressed uncertainty and those who held a negative view followed behind, in slightly lower numbers. The number of those who saw it in a positive light was also considerable, but it came third in size. The respondents' opinions also differed when focused on specific aspects of the communist regime, with the majority of them seeing the education system and the meritocracy at work positively. Their opinions on social ties during the communist regime also matched those of the participants in the focus group discussion, viewing them as stronger. The political system was also viewed as more stable, although this doesn't necessarily indicate that it was better due to its dictatorial nature, they also viewed society as more equal back then. The role of women, however, was not seen as positively, with the respondents claiming that it was weaker back then.

The survey overall indicated that although the participants claimed that the movies didn't portray the realities of the time, Albanian communist-era movies do shape the perceptions of the people born after the fall of communism on the communist regime itself in Albania, even though their responses are diverse and convey different perceptions. This outcome is also evident in the comparison between the control group consisting of all respondents who have not watched any Albanian communist-era movies and the rest of them, who not only did not have the same level of awareness (a smaller percentage claimed that they had enough knowledge) about the communist past, but their opinions were not very diverse either. Mostly, they either had a negative perception of the past or expressed uncertainty. The respondents who had

previously watched communist-era movies were characterized by a mix of opinions, giving the impression that being exposed to the propagandistic elements in the movie did play a role.

Both the qualitative and the quantitative data, when compared to the existing literature, suggest that in general, what the public understands is not limited to what they are watching on the screen, in contradiction with Rosenstone's theory (1995), but upholds the idea that movies help people who haven't experienced the past firsthand to challenge their knowledge and understanding of it (Marcus, Metzger, et al., 2010). When it comes to the models of narrative effects and the role of movies in shaping perceptions towards a political regime, the Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model was the only one applicable to the study, as in all cases, the participants were impacted by the quality of the storyline and production, albeit not enough to change their opinions on the topic. Furthermore, the participants were able to spot the propaganda elements in the communist-era movies, supporting the idea that the more intellectual the public is, the less affected they are by propaganda. Lastly, it also supports the idea that nostalgia for the period, although not present in the majority of the respondents, is mostly tied to the imperfections of the present reality (Rekšć, 2015).

In conclusion, both the qualitative and the quantitative data imply that Albanian communist-era movies play a complex role in shaping the perceptions of young people born after the communist regime in Albania of the communist regime itself. This role is defined as complex as other factors contribute to these perceptions and understanding of the past, especially the personal stories, and experiences told by family members who experienced the regime firsthand. Furthermore, the sample is aware of the propagandistic elements and nature of these movies, but evoke feelings of nostalgia and produce mixed emotions about various aspects of the regime, some of them being positive, but mostly condemning the regime. Therefore, this study supports the theories introduced earlier in the research on the impact that media and especially movies play in the way people view a historical period and a political regime and answers the research question, suggesting that Albanian communist-era movies do have a role, albeit complex, on the perceptions of people born after the fall of the communist regime, although it is not the most

important factor. By analyzing the case of Albania specifically, also fills a gap in the literature, serving as a basis for other researchers to conduct more extensive studies on it.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to analyze the role that Albanian communist-era movies played in the perceptions of people born after the fall of communism on the communist regime itself in the country. By combining both qualitative and quantitative analysis, the research sought to identify the impact of these movies on the perceptions of the participants in the study, by analyzing the participants' thoughts in some focus group discussions conducted at Epoka University and the respondents' answers to a massive survey.

The findings turned out to be quite interesting, as they indicated through the evaluation of the qualitative and quantitative data, that Albanian communist-era movies do have an impact on the perceptions of people who didn't live through the regime themselves, but they are not the sole determining factor. The students who participated in the focus-group discussions claimed that in general they had positive feelings towards the movies and expressed nostalgia, indicating that they might influence their perceptions. At the same time, they also shared the same mistrust towards the depiction of historical events and daily life in the movies screened, mainly due to family members' stories of the past. Therefore, it became evident that these personal accounts from family members and other information sources had a bigger influence on how they perceived the communist regime.

This conclusion was also supported by the analysis of the quantitative data from the mass survey. Even though the perceptions of the historical period and the political regime varied, the majority of the respondents seemed to have a good level of awareness of the topic. However, their views ranged from negative to positive when asked about their opinions based on the movies watched,

so, it is reasonable to assume that they do have an impact, creating a mix of perceptions. But as indicated during the focus-group discussions, negative feelings could also be produced based on how appealing the participants found the storyline. Furthermore, the study also showed that the participants' field of study also affected their answers, as Political Science students tended to see the communist regime more unfavorably, except for elements like social ties and the quality of life, which generated mixed opinions. The rest of the participants were more diverse in their opinions, sharing both doubts and positive feelings toward the regime.

To conclude, the findings of this study suggest that the role of Albanian communist-era movies is complex when it comes to the perceptions of people born after the collapse of the communist regime on the system. Although these movies incited a range of feelings and triggered nostalgia for a time that they have not lived, other elements such as family personal accounts and experiences play a bigger role in how these people perceive the past and the regime. Pre-existing beliefs based on the stories told and information gathered from other sources to some extent, have also equipped the participants with the ability to identify the propagandistic features in these movies, regardless of having conflicting thoughts on various aspects of the regime.

While the contributions of this study are significant to the context of Albania, due to financial and time constraints, a limited sample size was used and therefore, with a larger and more diverse sample, better and more in-depth insights could be generated in the future. By using large-scale datasets and expanding the variety of research methods used, other researchers can expand on this work, which humbly serves as a starting point to understanding the thoughts of new generations in Albania on one of the most isolated regimes in history, through cinema.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Survey Questions

General questions

1. What is the gender you identify with?
 - a. Girl/Woman
 - b. Boy/Man
 - c. None of the above
 - d. I prefer not to answer
2. What is your age?
3. What is your level of education?
 - a. High school
 - b. Bachelor's Degree
 - c. Master's Degree
 - d. PhD
 - e. I prefer not to answer
4. What is your academic background?
5. How informed are you about the communist past in Albania?

Not at all informed Mostly uninformed I'm not sure Mostly informed Very informed

6. Compared to nowadays, how do you think life was during the communist regime, economically-wise?

Much worse Worse I don't know Better Much better

7. Compared to nowadays, how do you think life was during the communist regime, socially-wise?

Much worse Worse I don't know Better Much better

8. Compared to nowadays, how do you think life was during the communist regime, politically-wise?

Much worse Worse I don't know Better Much better

9. Have you watched any Albanian communist-era movies? If so, could you please share some of the titles?

10. How would you evaluate the communist regime in Albania based on the movies you've watched?

Very bad Bad Neutral Good Very good

11. How would you evaluate the education system compared to nowadays, based on the stories told through Albanian movies?

Much worse Worse I don't know Better Much better

12. Based on the movies you have watched how would you evaluate meritocracy at work compared to nowadays?

Much higher Higher I don't know Lower Much lower

13. Considering how women are portrayed in these movies, how would you evaluate their role in the communist Albanian society?

Much stronger than nowadays Stronger than nowadays I don't know Weaker than nowadays Much weaker than nowadays

14. How do you evaluate social ties during the communist regime based on the movies watched?

Much stronger than nowadays Stronger than I don't know Weaker than Much weaker than
than nowadays nowadays nowadays nowadays

15. Based on the movies you have watched how would you evaluate the living standards during the communist regime compared to nowadays?

There was much more equality There was more equality I don't know The same as There was no
more equality equality nowadays equality

16. How do you see the political regime during the communist years compared to nowadays?

Much more stable More stable I don't know Less stable Not stable at all

17. Do you think these movies portray the reality of living during the communist regime?

18. Thank you for your time and contribution. If you want to add something else that you felt it wasn't possible through the previous questions, please do so here:

Appendix B. Focus Group Transcript 1: The Lady from the Town

Researcher: Hello again, everyone and welcome to the discussion.

First, I want to thank you for your patience when watching the movie and hope that you enjoyed it somehow. As it was communicated before the start of the activity, before even screening the movie, today's discussion will take place in the framework on my thesis as a student of Political Science and International Relations here at Epoka University. The research question that I intend to answer in this case is: "How do movies produced during communism in Albania affect the perceptions of young people who were born after 1990, i.e. after the fall, of the communist regime in Albania?" First, before we go into more details about the film and the regime, was this the first Albanian film you've watched or had you watched others before?

**Most of the participants reply saying that they have watched others before, while one of them says that this was the first time. Comment confirmed with notes taken during the discussion*.*

Researcher: What impression did the movie leave on you? What kind of feeling?

Participant 1: Even though we did not live in that period, it evoked a certain nostalgia in us. Maybe it comes from family discussions, from the experiences of our family members who lived through it, and other information that is not fully portrayed here as I also mentioned it in the questionnaire (the students were presented with the general survey to complete before watching the movie), but overall, it's very good. It shows that part of the community, as something that was emphasized and promoted during communism and I wouldn't say it's a bad thing. Personally, this is my opinion.

Researcher: Okay, that's great, thank you. Anyone else have something to share? It's okay, you can express yourself freely, you can just say how it made you feel. Did you have a bad feeling? Good feeling? Were you neutral? Did it make you think of something specific?

Participant 2: The feeling it gives you is a good feeling in general, because in my opinion, if I'm finding the right words to express myself, it seems like it's sugar-coating that period a lot and it's not that it gives you a bad feeling per se. The work that they're doing - they're plowing the land, and it's being glamorized and shown as something people do with love, people do with joy when it might not have been so. And I share this opinion based on personal experience, well, not my experience but my family's. My dad grew up in the North and all my life I grew up with his stories on how during communism there were very big discrepancies in terms of poverty between people who lived in the city and those who lived in the countryside. And because they were living in very extreme and poor conditions nobody was happy. Life wasn't as beautiful as it's portrayed in the movie at all. For me, it looks like a very big contrast between what the state was probably trying to show people and how it really was.

Researcher: Okay, anyone else who wants to share a personal experience or any stories from their relatives, loved-ones, grandparents?

Participant 3: I wanted to say something, to follow up on what Participant 2 said. First of all, every movie is censored (it actually refers to propaganda, the wrong term) and it's seen even in the posters shown in the movie such as the 'Glory to the Albanian Labor Party' one. No movie has shown reality as it really was.

Participant 4: In my opinion, this was just a very nice commercial. As others also mentioned it, it highlights the most important parts: the community part, the fact that almost everyone is rich, very happy, and the film for me focuses more on the fact that the countryside is as good as the city, seeing that Ollga also repents and is very happy to live in the countryside and work there by the end of the movie. A character that I noticed in the movie is that of the teacher, Tirka. We see that he constantly wants to leave the countryside, he wants to move, but as we know from our relatives, that was not really possible and he would go where the Party wanted him to go. We saw Tirka get reprimanded at one point, get his ear pulled so to speak. "Why do you do this?", "Why are you leaving?" All these words and these characters seem to be a little critical and hostile towards Tirka who wants to leave and return to his life, not obey and be frowned upon. All in all, their critical nature is manifested in Ollga herself when one of Mel's marriage candidates turns out to be a politically persecuted person and Ollga who has a very bad, very objectionable kind of reaction. The way she tore the paper in anger and she said that

it was better to stay in the mud than to give her daughter to a politically persecuted person shows that this is also a kind of advice, a warning to all the people to not behave like that and to love the Party because it is good and cares for them.

Participant 2: That was a scene that had left an impression on me and that I forgot it was even part of the movie (referring to the scene Participant 4 mentioned above). Imagine a young child or a teenage watching that scene and coming from a family in internment, how would they feel, meaning that so to speak, they were like outcasts from society and everyone knew that there was something wrong with them.

Researcher: Okay, a question for clarification. We are all Political Science students, so I take it for granted that we have all the information about the communist period, but it's okay if you don't. In this case I believe you understand what it's implied by a 'bad biography'?

Everyone nods saying yes

Participant 5: I have family members who were interned. My great-grandfather was interned for 17 years, 15 years in Spaç and 2 years in Burrel, and the prejudice then was very big against people who had such biographies. My great-grandfather was interned just because someone said he had spoken ill of the leader, Enver, and he was the chairman of the cooperative. It's just something random not related to the movie, but regarding "The Lady from the Town", I noticed Koci's character. **Other participants laugh** The way they saw "art" back then was interesting. That is, he supposedly created art in his way, sculptures, and sold them as his own, but it looked like something he did not make himself. So was his perception of art. In communism art was censored, art was to promote the Party and not a way to express yourself and actually there was a very cool part when Teto Ollga was talking with her daughter and she mentioned those terms: 'liberal' and 'conservative' and said: "Yes, because they are liberal, they let the child express themselves" and Ollga said "Yes, because we are conservative" and this was a very original way to say that society was actually conservative despite hiding behind some censorship.

Participant 6: I would like to touch upon the work aspect; people worked in the so-called cooperatives back then. My grandfather worked there and they tortured him so much. The wages they received were so little, but they (referring to the communist regime) tried to promote

community life and that is, that peace that people felt among each-other, even though it might not be what happened in reality, just as Participant 2 said earlier.

Participant 7: Yes, and the way they sing about their work in the fields, the way that the song goes into an extreme patriotism that does not have the limits it should have because the work in the fields, however beautiful may be, in quotes, it is not really that beautiful that people would weave great glories, or to make hymns for in such way.

Participant 1: The movie was mostly focused on the community part, on how they did everything together. Even the girl (referring to the character of Meli), even though she was a doctor by profession, when needed for community affairs, she went with them, if she needed to go to the theater, she went to the theater. And personally, I've heard personal experiences and I don't see it as such a bad thing to do together, to come together in a community and to do so much for each other.

Participant 7: No, we're not saying that it was a bad thing, we are just saying that it was imposed by other people.

Participant 1: It might have been imposed by others, but it was still something for the community.

Participant 6: No, that's not the issue, it's that you were seen more as part of the community than as an individual.

Researcher: It's okay. The fact that you don't agree with each other is a good thing. You are sharing your opinion and that is the purpose of this study, what we see from the movies and how we think about the period.

Participant 4: I feel very ambivalent about this idea of community outreach. That is a good thing, something positive, that you help the country where you live, help for example for plowing the fields because you are still eating that food. But then, it depends. I heard from a neighbor of mine that not only did they take away the right to her property she had but they forced her to build houses for other people on a property that belonged to her during the communist era which is a bit like, I won't say inhumane, but negative. Yes, for example they are taking your property, they are taking what belongs to you, they are taking your wealth, and

leaving you in a house with four walls and a building with four floors, they are forcing you to build it for people who have nothing to do with your goal, your hack. It depends, it always depends.

Participant 8: I think that this whole community idea has been blown out of proportions in the movie 'The Lady from the Town' because, let's not forget, from the records in the state archives and the Sigurimi Files, these people who loved each other so much, this warm community, were agents and associates of Sigurimi i Shtetit and it was just anyone who was close to you, no matter how close they were. This is based on family experiences, and the experiences of many other Albanians who have given their testimonies in court proceedings as in various documentaries that have been recorded. So, this community we are talking about was about fear and insecurity as well. I have noticed that the way they express themselves is more careful and detailed in the way they address each other. This I noticed not only in the movie (The Lady from the Town) but also from other people in real life, other than my family members and friends. Various reports and historical books such as one of a witness from Shkodra mentioned that you were afraid and had to be careful with everything you said, from social life to private life. This shows that there were deep deficiencies, which is missing from this movie. And one thing that I've noticed and that I like about these films is that they're very politicized, and I like how they express it and the way they capture it on camera. What I've noticed is that there are a lot of slogans and it's impossible to not film them considering that they are everywhere, and in one way or another will be captured. You keep seeing different slogans, which looked at from a psychological point of view, it's repeated, whether intentionally or unintentionally, making propaganda a way of life as well as the institution that produced this kind of movie.

Researcher: Thank you. I think we discussed and exhausted the political character of the time so I would like to move on to the economic aspect of it. Participant 4 mentioned something a bit earlier, but anyway, what are your thoughts based on what you saw in the movie?

Participant 8: As portrayed in the movie or...?

Researcher: As portrayed in the movie, but you can definitely blend it with other information you may have, like 'I saw these in the film, but based on family history, I know about these experiences.'

Participant 8: Well, first of all, there is plenty, which I saw when everyone gathered together and everyone could eat from the watermelon and various foods that were served there in front, but also from the residents themselves who lived in Tirana. Tirana was considered the most developed out of all the other areas, in the central area, and even here there were major food shortages, and I'm not just talking about our family experience here. Tirana as a whole had food shortages and later the rationing system was introduced, where you had to stand in line. I didn't see this in the movie, for example, I haven't seen any film emphasize this kind of thing, because this would negatively impact the image that the government then wanted to convey and not only regarding food. There is also the ability to freely express yourself on what is lacking, what is not lacking and to say that there were food shortages. Back then you weren't only dependent on the cooperatives for products, but there was this delusion created by the reports published on quotas. Often, we have seen it in the state archive files as well which report what was produced and the amount on which it was produced, creating the idea that there was a big huge production. But, according to the system back then, if you had a quota and you didn't fulfill it, you were punished but what could you do about it? In order not to be punished by the state, no matter how absurd the quota was, they made up the numbers. This is something related to what I said at the beginning, that you couldn't complain and say how much you had and how much you didn't have. And this is the second consequence that caused the collapse of the entire economy and system in Albania.

Researcher: Okay, how do you see social relations?

Participant 1: Related to government agents (referring to Sigurimi informants)?

Researcher: As you wish.

Participant 9:

Shall we start with the beginning of the movie? Looking at it and based on something that I've noticed even nowadays, when it comes to society, both children and adults, they seem to have been closer then than they are today, even families. Nevertheless, even though it's said that there was equality, there was a lot of polarization. First of all, cities and the countryside stood on two different ends and this was not only shown in today's movie but plenty of other movies as well.

If you had a better job, you were looked at differently and if you had a better biography, you were looked at differently.

Participant 1: Yes, but this is a matter of mentality.

Participant 9: That society itself created it then.

Participant 1: Yes.

Participant 9: It is something that started then and is still present today. Today, it's left us with the idea that - Ollga says at the beginning of the film, "I would rather have kept you home and found you a husband and we stayed here than to go to work in the countryside". What does this mean? She will work for the house instead of working for herself. These are the consequences that we still face nowadays because as I was watching Ollga, I was thinking of my own childhood. I have seen so many old women and men who still think like that, still to this day. In my apartment building, people still say that and it's a sort of inequality that keeps getting worse. These are the consequences brought by the regime itself, the very social construct of that time. Allow me to move on to the economy. In the movie we saw the watermelon that was cut into equal pieces, which symbolizes - let's say in quotes - that everything was rationed equally, but in reality that was so little for the majority of the people that those who didn't even have the chance to try it said: "It's so good that we are equal and everyone gets its own share". There are two aspects when it comes to the communist regime because there were people who were lucky to have a good job, a good biography, lived in Tirana and could have a better income and there were those on the opposite end, who had ten children to feed. I can share a personal story. My uncle worked as a driver during communism and says that those were the days. If I ask someone who was exiled and suffered, he'd say that it wasn't so good. That's the issue in my opinion, that the society couldn't express themselves back then but today they are expressing it in different ways. Now there's a clear distinction between a parent who lived through the communist period and was raised by parents who lived through communist, and our generation, of the 21st century who have no idea what it means to live in those days. There is a clear separation of thought.

Researcher: This is also the purpose of the study because I know that our views are not necessarily the same as those of our parents, but that does not mean that they were not shaped

or influenced by what we heard from them, by movies or by other factors. I promised you that the discussion would last somewhere around 30 minutes, but since we are a large group, I would like to ask each of you to share something positive and negative that you saw in the film.

Participant 10: If I had only watched the movie and didn't have any other information, I would say that life was very beautiful back then and that those people are very happy, even happier than today.

Researcher: And based on the additional information you have then?

Participant 10: It would be the opposite.

Researcher: I mean, do you think what's in the film is a good portrayal of the reality at the time or not?

Participant 10: No.

Researcher: You think not.

Participant 1: Normally not because the regime did not allow you to speak the truth. If you did, you would have the same fate as the convicts and the interned, and who knows what would happen next because there are also people who have been killed.

Participant 10: I noticed that they didn't have TVs in their homes and all they could do was to go to the theater and only the theater had a TV that I don't know if it was even turned on or not.

Participant 1: It's not that they didn't have TVs then. There were a few families who did.

Participant 2: There was a family in the entire neighborhood who did and they used to watch TV together.

Participant 4: In my opinion, something positive that the movie shows and that I have also seen it in the Albanian society itself, is that we are very connected to each other, regardless of how many spies there might have been. You can also see it in the last scene when Mel gets sick and all the villagers pay her a visit to see if she's doing okay.

Participant 2: People still do this in the countryside, they visit each other's homes.

Participant 4: Not only in the countryside, we have it for example in Shkodër as well. We are a big family and if one gets sick, every relative goes to see if they are okay.

Participant 1: And the scene where all the neighbors came out when they left the town to move to the countryside.

Participant 4: Yes, all the neighbors came out to wish them a good trip and I believe that this is a positive thing.

Participant 1: Yes, it is a positive thing that has remained.

Participant 2: Something that I found positive was the importance given to culture during that time. So, this is a small village and they have a culture center. They have events where people learn poetry and do theater. Maybe you've heard it from your parents, but they had a summer cinema that went around to different towns. That was a sort of value that was given to art, especially authentic Albanian art and you heard of and saw Albanian works everywhere and everyone knew about them. At least when I was a child, I didn't have that. I don't know if it was different in other cities, but I grew up in a small town and it was completely different for me, so I would say that that was something positive about that time. Even though it was just within the confines of Albania, the significance of art and culture was great and that should be appreciated in my opinion.

Researcher: Anyone else?

Participant 10: Something positive that I wanted to share which also goes in line with Participant 2 and Participant 4 said and which is something that I also mentioned to Participant 2 during the screening, is the way nature is cared for. Back then, nature was important, there were a lot of trees and a lot of greenery. One day, my father was telling me that the roads from Tirana to Gjirokastër used to be full of trees and greenery and now he only sees buildings, new construction projects, smog and this is something positive about the past. Something negative is the facades that stand out in every movie, which for me is one of the highlights. You'll always have that love for the Party there, you'll say you love it even though you might not.

Researcher: To clarify, what do you mean by 'facade' in this case?

Participant 10: I meant the slogans, I didn't remember the word at first.

Participant 6: I wanted to say another positive thing. For example, love might have been more sincere in the time of communism, and as far as we have heard it is true.

Everyone laughs

Participant 1: That's the good thing about not having too much freedom.

Participant 11: There was also a question in the survey about the role of women, which was equaled to that of the men and more opportunities were created for her, even to be employed in a profession that a while ago would be stereotyped as belonging only to men.

Researcher: Was that something that was carried over from the movie?

Participant 11: Yes, Mel, for example, was a medical assistant, even though many could probably think that a woman could never be a doctor.

Participant 6: There was also that scene when a character says that only the men were required (to fix the dam) and all the girls went too.

Participant 2: I think that's not true because I don't think that girls used to go in the middle of the night to fix a dam.

Participant 9: Yes, even in other Albanian films there are quite a few women who are also in positions such as engineers, for example.

Participant 12: I think I have enough information about communism from books, history, trips to the museum and this is actually the only Albanian movie that I have watched from start to finish and I don't know, it transported me to a different world and didn't connect at all with the information I have. It was completely different and I think it's successful propaganda. For example, if it was only about these movies, I don't know, I think we'd have a different perception.

Researcher: Anyone else who has something to share? My last two questions were somehow merged. I've mostly heard positive things about the movies, so does anyone have anything different to share?

Participant 1: Movies in general and art are supposed to be a bit entertaining and obviously, not every movie will show reality as it is, especially during that time.

Participant 9: When it comes to the media I would say that this film, but not only, is a big propaganda, and it is no coincidence that Albanian cinematography was given so much importance. Actors had a different status because of propaganda, it was the most important sector for a totalitarian regime. And all this enthusiasm of the youth to work in the countryside... Before, working in the countryside was a punishment. Family members of mine, my grandfather, was punished because of his family members and was taken to a remote village in Albania. It was a punishment for him, there was no enthusiasm at all, while here it's portrayed as something that the youth accepted with great pleasure, lots of passion. So, it's just propaganda combined with humor so that Albanians digest it more easily.

Participant 1: Well, they didn't go away to be punished, they went away for work (referring to the characters in the movie).

Participant 4: There also those who went voluntarily, but they didn't actually go voluntarily, they were forced to (referring to the reality).

Participant 8: That Shpresa, the Shpresa who went voluntarily in the movie.

Researcher: Alright. Unfortunately, we don't have time left to continue the discussion, however this study is a very good opportunity to continue further and who not, one of you can do it too since you all will eventually work on your own thesis. Before we leave, I wanted to thank you once again for your participation. The data, as you were informed before the discussion, is recorded and will be transcribed and analyzed. As it was also mentioned in the consent form and the information sheet you read, once the study is completed, if any of you is interested in the results or wants a copy of the transcript to confirm that it has remained true to the material, in the most accurate way possible, you can contact me via email. If you have any concerns or anything else that you want to discuss related to the study, again, you can contact me. And if you think something was left unsaid today, you can definitely add it at a later time. Many thanks! Hope you enjoyed it and have a great day.

Appendix C. Focus Group Transcript 2: While Shooting a Film

Researcher: Hello once again! Thank you so much for watching the film with us and for staying for the discussion. The film we'll be discussing today is "When a Film Was Being Shot" directed by Xhanfise Keko, produced in 1981. I don't know your thoughts in the movie, but before getting more in depth discussing the movie itself, is this the first Albanian movie you've watched or did you watch others before?

The participants reply that they have watched other films previously and some of them even say that they've watched a lot of them.

Participant 1: In general? Personally, it's - it's not very well done as a film, I've seen a few of them as well. I do not find this type of films attractive due to the fact that some of them deal with propagandistic themes, but there are some that really hold artistic value and are artistically accomplished, so it's not like they are constantly talking about the Labor Party during those days. Still, you can find these elements in every film, by in my opinion, if they have artistic value and are not focused on propaganda, I think they're an added value to the Albanian cinematography. They don't have to be censored.

Participant 2: Those films were made a long time ago and that's why you have such an opinion. There are many films whose purpose is educational, that help build you as a person even though they are served as some sort of lesson. But even the ones you've watched, you're right because a lot of people support them, but their goal was to convey that everyone should work for the state. That's how it was portrayed in the film, despite the fact that we know how those days were, life was difficult. History, our parents, our grandparents have taught us that, but the film's purpose what was not what you think.

Participant 1: No, what I think is that since I am part of today's generation, I am not part of the past generation, and it's not like they have a bad influence on me, so I just see them as traces of Albanian history, we don't have to get rid of them. There are bad stories, bad periods in history, every country has gone through them. That doesn't mean that we should kick them away or burn them down because they represent the long journey that our people have been through, how we've come so far, and what could be the root of the suffering we're experiencing today. I don't agree with communism as an ideology, but I also don't agree with having these films lose all their value because a lot of artists poured their sweat in them. Despite the pressure of the time and the censure, they still tried to bring out the truth as much as they could.

Researcher: All right, we're here today because we are all film enthusiasts and the event is organized in collaboration with the Film Club, which means that beyond the politics of it all, we wanted to watch a good movie, so we somehow do appreciate what we see on the screen, despite its positive and negative aspects. We'll be discussing the feelings it evoked regarding the communist period further on. One of the last public discourses was on the law proposed in the parliament to ban the films produced during the communist period, which sparked a lot of debate. It's not a question I would like to focus on during this study, it can be explored further by someone else. To focus more on the film we watched today, how did it make you feel? Or rather, what are the positive and the negative you take from it?

Participant 2: Caring about what other people think is very common in the Albanian culture. No matter how hard we try, we still think about the general opinion, if society will judge us, which has also made us a bit unkind to people around us, as well as the people we love and love us back. This movie basically shows us that we shouldn't look at it that way, that no matter what society thinks, family is sacred and shouldn't be separated. The toll was on an innocent person because even though the fault might have laid on the parents, the child was suffering the consequences of their separation.

Participant 3: But it also deals with a very common social topic in today's Albanian society, the divorce. For example, in the period in which the movie takes place, it was an extraordinary thing, it was not that talked about in Albanian families, while today it's become very normal and there's nothing wrong with two people who no longer agree with each other to divorce. I think one of the main takeaways of this movie is the denormalization of divorce, of two people

separating, because communist movies in themselves are centered around familial love, collectivity, how everything is pretty and nice, while we forget that what they're trying to convey is the opposite of what life was really like in those years.

Participant 4: I think the purpose of art in general and this movie specifically is to educate and re-educate, or propaganda. At the same time, I think that regardless of their purpose, whether they were meant to be a source of entertainment or education, I think they represent Albania's values and to share my thoughts on the study you mentioned earlier, I don't think they should be banned because at the end of the day they were part of Albania's history. Just like we had good days, we also had bad ones and banning these movies means banning everything. The feeling I get from the movie we just watched, but also based on other movies I've had the chance to watch, is nostalgia and strangely enough, nostalgia for a period we haven't even lived. It's just things they say or small details in the movie that make you think of your parents, that you have seen in them while growing up, meaning that there are certain things you have noticed in your mom and dad, how they behave that make you think of your childhood even though you haven't lived through those days. Regarding the movie we watched today, I've watched it as a kid as well and I remember the ending when the kid goes: "Mom! Dad! Dad! Mom!" and feeling euphoric because the movie had a happy ending. However, nowadays, as I watch it once more, I understand it differently because I'm all grown up and I see it from a different perspective, realizing that for Genci's mom it was not really a happy ending because she still ended up with the man who slapped her across the face just because she wanted to be a bit more independent.

Researcher: In fact, the movie is quite famous for its portrayal of women's role in society and we see elements such as – for example, when Genci says: "When I grow up, I will let my wife build the factories wherever she wants." or when Genci's dad says that you need to be on top of your work at all times, meanwhile, he thought that his wife, also working, should work only in Tirana to be close to her family and it was not important for her to be on top of her work at all times. It depends on how you see the role of women. Do you think the movie portrayed the situation during those years accurately?

Participant 5: This kind of still happens nowadays, it's nearly the same situation. People are still trying to walk towards a different and better future, more cultured, but we're still in the same situation where women need to stay close to home, constantly work under the shadow of

men and it's sad how it's still going on. This comes from their families and the way they grew up even though people are trying to change for the better, be more cultured and open-minded when it comes to women's rights and freedom.

Researcher: Alright, based on other Albanian movies you've watched, do you think women were more emancipated during the communist regime?

Participant 6: There was a new wave of women empowerment, being one of the focal points of the Communist Party. Now I don't know if it was a façade or it was honest work to really empower women, but it's evident everywhere. Women were everywhere, in movies, in battlegrounds fighting alongside men, in the heavy industry. What I am trying to say is that wherever there were men, there were also women, even in those positions that we assume are for men only due to stereotypes. In communist cinematography, the presence of women has been constant and I think it's something positive if you see it like that. I don't know what the purpose was because I didn't live during that period and I can't make assumptions, but I think it was a good thing. However, I noticed that even though the movie was centered around women's independence, it was also heavy on the Party, on work, on the State. "I will work for the State" was a literal quote from the movie, as in we mustn't stop working for the State, we cannot give up on the State. I think that even though she was fighting for her own independence, there were parts in the script where she literally said that she would do something for the wellbeing of the State.

Participant 4: I think this is not due to women's rights as much as it was because of the heavy emphasis on collectivity and being equal. It was not important that women grew, but that everyone worked for the state and everyone was equal. So, I don't think that propaganda back then or the movie itself aimed to give more rights to women and make them more independent, but instead to have both men and women work for the State.

Participant 3: Yes, that's true.

Participant 5: Because that was the only way that propaganda could be convincing. Both genders, all classes, even though there were supposedly no classes, I think it's true that –

Participant 4: I think they kind of sold it that way, like it was for women's rights, but instead it was for the State.

Participant 5: They just needed to get both sides on board, both men and women. If they told women that they could work the same positions as men and they had more freedoms, maybe women would start believing in themselves and start loving the regime. I think this was the best way to take advantage of both sides, by making everyone feel part of the society.

Participant 3: Meanwhile I think that this was more fiction than reality. Regardless of what we see in movies, I don't think I know of any women in the Communist party of the time. Maybe it's a lack of research on my end, but I know a lot of politicians that belonged to the Communist Party and none of them are women.

Participant 7: There were women political figures. You could say that it was just propaganda, but it didn't really matter much if it was a man or a woman, at the end it was Enver Hoxha who acted as God. As for the movie, you can tell that even though the Communist Party tried to work on the emancipation of women, doesn't matter if it was for propaganda or not, the burden of housework and raising children fell of women. So, in my opinion, it was just a façade and that was more evident after the fall of the regime when all gender norms defaulted to what they were before. Even though the communist regime tried to include women in the workforce, it didn't deal with the root cause of the problem, which were the values of the society. That's why once communism collapsed, all that progress collapsed as well.

Researcher: Okay. There were certain elements in the movie – actually, I'd rather not mention them since I'd like for the discussion to be a bit more unstructured – but there were certain elements related to the economy during the communist regime. We're from different backgrounds and it's not necessary for you to have Political Science knowledge, but based on what you saw on today's movies and other Albanian movies you've watched on your own, how do you evaluate the economic situation during the communist regime?

Participant 1: At least in this movie, but also others I've watched previously produced during the communist period, I see a great selection of shooting locations. So, I see the best hotels of the time, the costume design is also very good, so it's clear that there's been a great investment to show the public how well they were living, even though they were poor. So, they went to

such lengths for nothing. I noticed during the library scene, before the group of children went to the hotel, that there were two extras who were dressed so beautifully. I haven't had the chance to see that kind of jacket in my life. What I've heard from other people – I don't know – is contradictory to what I saw today. I think that what we see of the economy in the movies is a complete lie. People didn't have those living standards and there was a lot of suffering, they just couldn't talk about it.

Participant 4: It's strange how in most of the books written about the communist period or according to the stories our parents and grandparents have told us, a great poverty is depicted – the economy was terrible and people so poor that when the movie started, I was surprised to see that kind of hotel and elevator. Then I started to notice the hotel more, how people were dressed and thought about how big of a lie it all was, a lie to convince people that we live in a different way, we don't live in poverty, we are able to build these hotels and dress well, so you just need to work and prioritize working for the State to achieve all of them. So, was it a way to encourage competition or to brainwash people?

Participant 6: As for competition, there were no classes so...

Participant 8: Were these movies allowed to be screened abroad in those days? Because it could have been a way to show other countries how well Albania was doing.

Participant 5: I'm not really sure about that.

Researcher: When Albania had good relations with People's Republic of China, those movies were screened there and as far as I know, they are still available online there to this day.

Participant 8: That's what I'm saying. Maybe this was a way to prove something to the outside world because Albanians were aware of the food shortage, while the main character could afford a whole bag of apples for his mom and a whole bag of apples for his dad, while people didn't have enough food to last the week.

Participant 5: No, it's true, it's true, Albania painted a good picture of itself abroad. I remember that it once won a cooking competition and statistically, it was the healthiest country. According to the statistics the government at the time sent, Albanians were well-fed, meanwhile Albania

was having a crisis and they'd lied about everything. Obviously, people abroad couldn't fact check these statistics as they had no idea what went on in Albania.

Participant 4: But it could have also been –

Researcher: My apologies for the interruption, but did you want to add something earlier? (this is directed at another participant)

Participant 9: No, it's just that Participant 8 reminded me of the apples scene, which in turn reminded me of something that my dad said, that they used to save the good stuff for New Year's. So, even an orange was saved for New Year's, while in the movie they were very prosper and it made me think of the difference between living in the village and in the city. In my opinion, what was shown in the movie is very similar to what we're living nowadays, because I think it's more common nowadays for women to work close to home than back then when it comes to living in rural areas. According to what I've heard from my family, it was unthinkable for women to work and for men to be stay-at-home husbands. The roles were very clear and this mentality was even conveyed from women themselves to their daughters. I see a difference in the implementation of the communist regime in rural and urban areas, but maybe I'm being lied to in this movie? It's not really something that I have information on, on how it was for rural areas, but maybe that would be something interesting to discuss.

Researcher: Do you feel like you had enough information on the communist period before you watched the movie? Did you have any thoughts on it and did those thoughts change after watching the movie? Not necessarily on the regime as a whole, but maybe on certain elements you watched in the movie as well. So, do you share the same thoughts before and after you watched the movie or did something change?

Participant 1: Regarding our knowledge on communism? The things that I see are a lot different from what I previously knew, but I don't think – I mean, I'm not convinced by what I just watched, I have the same opinion.

Participant 3: At the same time, we're talking about a generation who have grown up with parents who lived during the communist period, grandparents who lived the communist regime, meaning that we've also talked about this topic with each other. We are also used to the

comparisons our parents and grandparents make between the period we're living in and what it used to be, so we can understand that it's all a lie. We've heard a lot of stories, watched a lot of documentaries and I think the logic is very simple in order to understand what life used to be like during those years.

Participant 10: I completely agree with Participant 3. It has a lot to do with the fact that we know what it used to be like, or to better phrase it, we wanted to be informed on it because if we didn't have any information and we just watched this movie, well, it as a very nice movie, everyone was happy, and I think this serves as a motivation for those people calling for the rise of Enver again. This is also stems from the fact that people nowadays hear about the order during the communist regime, how things were kind of clear cut, there was law and order and for them it's enough to ask for those days back. Who wouldn't like for those days to be back if they really were like in the movies? Something that I found interesting is that there was a scene when the boy says: "Take a picture of me and my family" and I was picturing the old photographer in today's Tirana and whether he would ever have the chance to take that picture. This is exactly the same to what Participant 3 said about the fact that we have enough information on what it used to be and are able to differentiate between what is real and not and not fall for it whenever we see a beautiful scene in the movie. Yes, it was a pretty scene, but the reality wasn't that pretty.

Participant 4: I also think that it's very obvious that whatever we see in the movie is an illusion and there's nothing to ponder on whether it's real or not or change your opinion on an entire regime because of it, but hearing our grandparents say that it was better back then and that the 1st of May was celebrated more nicely, or that everyone was united, was something that really made me think hard. There's just two ways to look at it: either they only remember the good stuff because of nostalgia or they really didn't have the time to do and enjoy everything that they do and enjoy today. They didn't have time to work on mental health and depression, think about their gender and sexuality, and lived a simpler life which was probably happier for them.

Researcher: Based on what you saw in the movie and taking the entire Albanian cinematography in consideration, which regime do you think is better: the old one or the one we're living in today?

Participant 1: The regime as a whole or...?

Researcher: Well, I'm referring to the political situation, the economic ones, social relations, familiar relations, everything we saw in the movie. For example, you mentioned equality and well-being earlier.

Participant 1: I think I'm lucky I was born today because I've heard a lot from the previous generations about how we are lucky to be born in today's world. They say that they used to suffer a lot, that they didn't know what the world was like, what others used to wear, and that they lacked the information that we have today. Obviously, we can't say we've reached perfection, we're far from it, but I think democracy is a better choice than dictatorship, this is just my opinion. There are people who think differently.

Participant 3: No, I think it's an opinion shared by the masses as I don't think they're similar to each other at all, they're like parallel line, the authoritarian regime and the democracy we're living in today.

Participant 6: The most dysfunctional democratic regime is still better than a totalitarian regime
laughs.

Researcher: Anyone who wants to share a different opinion?

Participant 3: No, I didn't want to share something different, I just think it's worth seeing it from all perspectives. My grandfather from my mom's side used to be an officer and he has no complaints about the communist period. He didn't use to get upset or stressed like he does today. On my dad's side, they were all catholic, they still are, and they lacked the most basic human rights. The only thing that's changed today is that back then there was a community, whereas today we live in a more individualistic society, so I think I'm lucky that I was born in an individualistic society where I have time to deal with my own problems, deal with my emotional state, work on my mental health and be able to speak freely, but still, I'm not sure. I don't think living in a dictatorship is better, but I think it's better for the individual to live in a way that – we have the tendency to live in illusion, whether today or back then, it's not up to us to change the world, other people call the shots. We're just under the impression that today we make our own decisions and we have the opportunity to speak up and speak freely.

Participant 6: At least today you don't get killed for having a different opinion, so...

Participant 4: Back then it was a dictatorship. One of the first thing it took action in was assimilation, having people lose faith and trust in everything but Enver Hoxha, so only trust the government. When it comes to the economy, well, New Year's was only celebrated in Albania because people could only eat whatever they liked on New Year's. Or at least eat a little bit more than what they were used to. During the 90s, when democracy was in its first steps, even though it was supposed to be a democracy, it was still a dictatorship pretending to be something else. I mean, a lot of people were killed. I don't know about the others in the room, but I have relatives who died during the transition period, in the 90s, which also brought a lot of discrimination for state workers. During the communist period, familiar love was supposedly the most important thing, but we know that people weren't supposed to feel love for each other, but for the State and for its empowerment. This kind of attitude empowered the Secret Police. There were a lot of spies around, you even had them in your own family, they could rat you out at any moment. It's not like it doesn't happen nowadays as well, but it was worse back then because the government needed to know everything that went on behind their backs, you know what I mean? Back in those days you had zero freedom of speech even if you thought you did. If you spoke your mind, you were persecuted. All your relatives would suffer the consequences of it, even if it was just one person saying the wrong thing. That's wasn't good at all. People back then lived on the lies they were told and people today live in the lies they are told.

Researcher: Are you talking about the current regime or...?

Participant 2: Yes, and I can say it today, but if I said the exact same thing back then, I'd have the Secret Police at my door and you'd be joining me in my fate as well. That would be just because you listened to me, not agreed, just listened.

Researcher: Something that is often brought up when talking about the past is the community feeling, the fact that people did a lot for each other, which we could also see in the movie. The fact that the colleagues of Genci's parents, their friends, tried to help them fix their relationship, so it was like there was a whole community engaged in their ordeal. How do you see that?

Participant 3: Obviously, right now I wouldn't like for the entire neighborhood to be involved in my personal relationships because –

Participant 2: I also said that.

Participant 3: - because it's nonsense. At the same time, I think that this community thing was a bit forced back then, because nobody cared what happened in each other's houses, and nobody loved each other that much. We know very well that Albanians don't do enough for each other, they don't even love their own brothers and sisters. I don't want to go off topic and start a whole bigger discussion...

Participant 2: Both in theory and in practice, people want their privacy, it makes them feel more in control. Back then, privacy was nonexistent, everyone knew what happened around, while now you're able to live your life in privacy.

Participant 11: Back then it was public privacy.

Participant 2: Now whatever you say in the family, remains in the family.

Participant 4: Seeing someone interfere with a couple's personal issues, for me is absurd. Just the idea that family as a concept was sacred for Albanians and I think it still, has made us fall behind when it comes to individual liberties. Trying as hard as we do to protect the image of our families is absurd. Family values in Albania are misunderstood in my opinion, taken out of proportion and make us undermine our individual rights in the name of the family.

Researcher: Are you talking about the Albanian society in general or what you just saw in the movie?

Participant 4: In general, but I think that communist mentality has played a big role in what we have today.

Researcher: Alright. What did you like and didn't like from the movie? Meaning that when you leave the room today, what will you be remembering as a good or as a bad thing?

Participant 1: You know? As an actor myself, I see then movie production as very realistic and credible, the child actors were very organic. It didn't look like they were acting, but as if the entire movie was taken from their real lives, without going too in depth of its meaning, which I really liked. Personally, I really appreciate the family ties even though they were not reflected properly in the movie, there's a lot I would like to change, but I would call the parents' sacrifice

a good thing, that is reaching a compromise. I don't know how their relationship progressed, but at least they tried to fix their relationship for the sake of their kid. I don't have anything else to add, their outfits were nice *laughs*, seems like a lot was invested in that to look good on screen. I admire the artistic work put into it and all the effort the artists put into it considering that they didn't have the proper conditions back then, they even lacked the equipment. I've heard a lot of stories from old actors on the trouble they faced to shoot these productions, so I really appreciate them. Other than what I just mention, I didn't really like much about it.

Participant 5: What I found interesting was that nobody had any time to spare on chatting, they were working during the day and when they went home, they were probably too tired, life was very active and I think this was really the case back in those days. It's true I mean, I don't think it was painted differently in the movie, people didn't have time to waste, ever moment was cherished.

Researcher: Anybody else has something to add?

Participant 2: As soon as the movie started, Genci gets upset with his friend because he tells him he has no father. In the days they were living, if you were even slightly different, you were an outcast. Because of that, Genci felt bad and even had trouble sleeping. For us it's now absurd because it's easier for people to accept differences, but back then everyone had to be the same, so the way I understand it, it was not about being equal but being the same. Nowadays, we seek equal rights, not equal living.

Participant 8: There are a lot of statistics that show that children whose parents stay together just for their sake tend to be happier and halfway through the movie, I was hoping that they would get back together, that until he slapped her. In my opinion, there are certain things that cannot be forgiven, so the fact that they got back together didn't make sense to me. I liked that their friends tried to get them back together, but I don't think they knew what happened. If they did, I wouldn't like that. Overall, I didn't like that they got back together, they could have found another way to be close for their son.

Participant 9: I don't think the kid was the only reason why they got back together, because the way she talks in the movie, explicitly saying that he's done with their marriage but doesn't say that she is, just shows that she didn't want him to take responsibility for his actions. I don't

think the movie focuses enough on women's rights, because if it did, she wouldn't get back together with him.

Participant 3: I just don't think the movie has a message.

Researcher: What do you think was the message?

Participant 3: I don't know, I can't figure it out, I found all the scenes in the movie very contradictory when put together.

Participant 4: The personal dilemma I faced is that when I watched the movie for the first time many years ago, I was happy to see them back together, but today, at 20 years old, I question their decision.

Researcher: Okay, do you think that what happened in the movie was an accurate representation of familiar relations back then?

Participant 2: I remember that towards the end of the movie, Kujtim says he doesn't want to return home because he feels embarrassed about what the world would think, and that's not an excuse. I'm not against divorce, but that shouldn't be the reason for it.

Researcher: Okay, I promised you that we would keep the discussion to a limit of 30-40 minutes and we've crossed it a little bit by now. Before we close the discussion, is there anything you would like to add that you think it's important related to the topic?

Participant 9: I think we pretty much discussed everything.

Participant 7: I think we need to remember our past because things tend to repeat themselves once we forget our history.

Participant 4: Even people that came out of the communist regime, our parents and grandparents, should be able to receive the same attention when it comes to mental health as we do.

Researcher: Alright, thank you so much for today. As you were also informed in the information sheet, the discussion today was recorded and will be transcribed, but you have the right to reach out and ask for a copy of it in case you'd like to check that whatever is written on

paper matches what you've shared here today. At the same time, once the study is completed, in case you'd like to know the results, you can send me an email about it. Once again, thank you so much, it was a great pleasure. Have a great day!

Appendix D. Focus Group Transcript 3: Debatik

Researcher: Hello, again! First of all, thank you so much for sticking around to watch the movie. Today we had the third and last screening in the series of activities here at Epoka University. The movie selected for today was “Debatik” because it’s considered one of the best movies of the time which deals with the theme of war. The movie was produced in 1961 and is relatively short compared to the others, but it’s the first Albanian film which is totally focused on the liberation war, despite the fact that there have been other attempts before to deal with the same topic. Today we have gathered to answer the question: “What role do communist era movies play in the perception that young people have towards the regime?” considering that we are one of the generations that didn’t live through it, but that doesn’t mean that we haven’t heard stories of the past from our family members, or that we already haven’t formed an opinion on the regime based on the the Albanian movies we have watched, which have been very accessible since we were kids. Before we go into more detail regarding the topics covered not only in “Debatik” but also in other movies, what kind of feelings do you have after watching the movie?

Participant 1: Confusion. Why the confusion? Well, first of all, because half of the movie doesn’t make sense to you if you don’t know the context in which it takes place. But even while watching it, there were comments going around such as: “What’s going on now?”, “Why are they doing this?”, “How is this connected to children?”, things like that. We do not understand, let’s say, the micro-signals that this movie tries to convey to the audience, ideological micro-signals let’s say. It also didn’t make sense to me because looking at it logically, not only from nowadays point of view, I can’t understand it, neither can I swallow the fact that it’s so important or so acceptable for a child to participate in the war or any sort of activity that has to do with firearms. Nowadays, we call that terrorism and recruiting children for that purpose, so at least, that’s the feeling I got from it. So firstly, it didn’t make sense to me. Secondly, based on what

I've heard from other people, I didn't understand its purpose. Okay, I am able to understand what a certain scene was built for, why that man was the bad guy, that the bourgeoisie had caused so much harm to normal people, why he was mean to children and was even disgusted by turtles, that sort of thing. I didn't understand why the Italian guy had turtles brought to him in the barracks. They ate turtles, but Albanians ate frogs, but that didn't appear in the movie. In the end, I couldn't understand what they achieved with that movie even back in those days. Maybe propaganda was strong in the media back then, because even Coli, an orphan boy who helped everyone and called them his family, was helped by the Italian cook, he was the only one who gave him food. The only place we saw him being welcomed wholeheartedly and really be treated as a child, because he was one, was in the barracks, despite the fact that he tricked them and found his way into the armory. So these are the first thoughts that come to mind after your question.

Researcher: Thank you. Anyone else?

silence

Researcher: Alright. Since we are all from different backgrounds, I cannot assume that each of you is enough informed on the communist period in Albania, but I want to ask you anyway what you know about that period.

Participant 6: I have more or less grown up with Albanian movies because my family members watched them a lot as they lived during those years, but what I wanted to say considering all the movies I've watched as a kid – I think I've watched this one before as well, but I was at a young age and it's not like I really understood the message as something that encourages us to engage and fight in the war against the enemy. What I wanted to add is that every time we watched this movie, my dad at least, always says that the war wasn't like that, and this is more or less my opinion, which has changed over time. If I thought that life was more beautiful under communism or people used to enjoy things differently back then, when I was a child, now I notice the censorship of these movies, or how they tried to make them more beautiful, idealize them. This doesn't only happen in "Debatik" but also in other movies I've watched such as "The Lady from the Town, in which there is a scene when they ask her what religion did the girl's husband have and she simply says his profession. What that means is that even religion itself

was not allowed at their time to be practiced. Likewise, in “The Lady from the Town”, there is a certain influence of the Secretary or the State functionaries in the decision-making of a family, and in more or less everything else. That is, the information needs to go through them first because they ask you.

Participant 1: Sorry because I took the floor for the second time, but the one thing we’ve heard of often, especially recently regarding this debate that took place in the media as well, in the parliament, is that these movies have artistic value and therefore should be screened. Even when we got the introduction to the activity, we were told that this is considered as one of the best movies of the time regarding the war theme, but while watching the movie, I didn’t see anything artistic about it. Apart from the fact that the camera quality was poor, okay, the times were difficult, but I didn’t even find any merit in the actors’ work. They were very rigid, their facial muscles did not move at all, their voice was monotonous. Whenever Coli spoke, the main character, we couldn’t make out half of the words, because he always ended up shouting. I mean, I didn’t see anything special about these actors’ skills that would make me think it would be sad to lose the movies. At the end of the day, these movies are propaganda, I didn’t see any art in them. That’s all I wanted to share with you.

Researcher: What do you personally understand by ‘regime’? In the sense that when you hear the term, what do you think of?

Participant 3: Something closed, a mechanism. The way the state works.

Researcher: That’s why I asked, because a regime is concerned with the political, economic, social aspects, which obviously are not shown in this movie, but we had the opportunity to see them in others. But in the movie you just watched, what positive and negative elements would you point out? This movie specifically, then the communist regime.

Participant 1: Even in “Taulant Wants a Sister” in which the main characters are children, and so to speak, withdrawn from political life, there are moments that leave you with a bad taste and you wonder what role they played at all. There’s a scene in the movie when someone asks him: “Whose son are you, kid?” and he says “I’m yours, I’m the state’s” and that leaves such a sour taste for me. What is this about being a son of the state? The child was regarded as an extension

of the state and in the same movie, he was asked to spill blood for the state. Where do you see children going to war and spill blood for the country?

Participant 3: The love for the Motherland was propagated to such extent that it felt normal.

Participant 1: So, why did a child have to spill blood and go get information?

Participant 3: Yes, that must have been what people were concerned with back then, but it's not fair, you're right.

Participant 1: There were 20 years old and 30 years old men, it's not like they did that, so why not them?

Participant 3: Well, they did too.

Participant 1: But in a class full of children, they weren't even in high school, probably secondary school, they would be the ones fighting for the country's liberation. What about the others? What did they do?

Participant 3: Because the children were easier to convince.

Participant 1: Well, that's why, because it was easier to recruit children so they were a target for the communist regime.

Participant 3: But even the means they used to find and break into these warehouses was through children because they had those friendly relations with the guards.

Participant 1: It's the same technique that criminal groups use today to bait someone, just like they did in the movie with the warehouse, because there were guns there. Or even later, when the Italians were chasing the children, I don't think that has ever happened in real life, to have them deal with children like that. The developed world doesn't deal with children, even if fascism was a bad regime in itself, it wouldn't preoccupy itself with five children. How old was Coli even?

Participant 3: Well, yeah, the movie stands for something else. They didn't intend to portray everything as it really happened, they had something else in mind.

Participant 1: The thing is that the model they made up in people's minds was something completely different to what really happened.

Participant 3: It was a metaphor *laughs*.

Participant 1: What do you mean, what kind of a metaphor? Even nowadays children are easily manipulated, what's the point. Would it make sense today if the Secret Police today recruited children and tried to use them because they're easy to get on board? That's exploitation, or even

–

Participant 3: Yes, but we're talking about communism.

Participant 1: That's what I'm saying, that I don't really like communism *laughs*.

Participant 3: I completely agree.

Participant 2: Actually, I was thinking about the production, the way camera worked – so, in case the director was filming the Italians or the fascists, the camera would film them from below, so they could look kind of evil. Meanwhile, when it was focused on the communists, it had the tendency to film them from above, so they were painted by light and sort of gave the impression that they were better people, warmer and they kind of symbolized an entire nation.

Participant 3: They were smiling the entire time.

Participant 2: Or they were plotting. Meanwhile, the Italians were kind of stoic and rigid and didn't really look good. They were always dressed well and took really good care of themselves in a way that kind of represented the Italian culture, so we could easily differentiate between the them and the simple individuals.

Researcher: Is there anyone here who thinks that what the movie was a good depiction of reality?

Participant 1: Look, there really were children back then who helped the partisans, or even children who went – you see, other than the war against the occupants, we also had a war among each other, regardless of how much this is discussed among historians. Either way, Albanians were at least in conflict if not war, so even when they spied on the other side, the National Front, there were children who died and it wasn't a big deal, they'd die for their country's ideals.

Instead of having them sleep over or providing food to them because it was a tough war, in the mountains, they killed children as accomplices, it's not like they were safe because they were children. A relative of my grandmother, her cousin, was a partisan since he was 15 years old and he used to say that he also would pick up guns, but that doesn't mean that it was a good or a normal thing, it's still a child going to war. This illegal sort of life that we just saw in the movie, where they would hide from the police and kind of be invisible, I mean, it's not like they were any sort of danger. Ah, something else that I wanted to add is regarding the headmaster who was laid off at the beginning of the movie. There were headmasters back then that were good and fostered the love for the country, but they didn't encourage students to pick up a gun and go fight in the mountains, at most to go out and protest. There were protests back then, but I didn't really get the meaning of the director's plot in the movie, what they were trying to say, why he was fired. The leaflets were distributed from both sides and each of them had their supporters, but it's not like every Albanian would die for the country.

Researcher: It's clear that the movie wants to empower the partisan's role in the liberation of the country. How do you see that? I mean, what do you think of the resistance now that you've watched the movie?

Participant 2: I would like to say something. It's not like I have a lot of information on that period, I mean, I know what I've learned in my history classes, but that's it. As for the movie, it's not like I watched it for the first time, I think there was a lot going on behind the scenes during the war and it was very organized. It was about these leaflets and it was mostly psychological. I liked how organized they were, but I don't really buy it. I'd like it if it were true. For example, if you think of the movie we watched a few days ago (referring to "When a Film was Being Shot"), Genci's parents were very simple in the work they did, but if you see the Italian characters in this movie, they were hanging out and eating out in restaurants, you could easily tell the difference between them. So, communism itself is about equality, as far as I know.

Participant 1: Everyone should be hungry, like Coli.

Participant 2: What I'm trying to say is that you don't see the difference in the characters' economic status in communist movies, like you do now.

Participant 1: There was a scene in which Coli tells his friend, the one who went to school because Coli didn't, that he didn't really think he could play with his friends, because he didn't play with thugs, which was also something else that I noticed about classes.

Researcher: Okay, it's important to point out that the story in the movie doesn't take place during communist year, it's produced during the communist regime but it's about the war. Therefore, the lack of food doesn't necessarily mean that during communism people were said to be equal, but they weren't really equal. There was a short supply during the war, but we should be more focused on the fact that the movie is made by the communist regime, during the communist years, so what was the purpose?

Participant 4: The purpose was to highlight the difference between the partisans and the invaders, to glorify their struggle and to point out their skills in fighting the war.

Participant 2: Or maybe it was to make people feel more grateful for what they had at the moment because it used to be worse for them.

Researcher: Okay, because the participation is a bit lower today, I need from each of you a sentence that describes your feelings after watching the movie. What do you think of the communist regime, how do you see it?

Participant 5: Based on what we just watched? Well, everyone was kind of equal. Everyone had a house, everyone got their share of food, what was theirs, meanwhile today we are living in such times that everyone works for themselves and gets what they deserve.

Participant 1: Okay, but it's not like everyone was really equal back then because the villagers had corn flour, while those who lived in the city wanted wheat flour.

Participant 2: You think everyone was equal back then because you see pictures where everyone is working collectively and you think about the high production and how they would achieve their targets by 120%, so there was always this hyperbolization of achievements. However, by comparing them to the real stories you've heard from your grandmother or your parents, you can tell that it was really a lie. Back then, like we said, food was rationed and you had to wait in a long queue and sometimes not even get what you were looking for, or what you deserved really.

Participant 3: But even what you deserved consisted of such a small amount, which wasn't enough for a human being. My mom told me that they were six kids and they had two boiled eggs per week, which the male siblings ended up eating, because you know, sexism. However, two eggs for six children are not enough to grow healthy. So, just because there was equality, doesn't mean it was good.

Participant 1: Because you brought up sexism, even the time in which the movie we watched today takes place, was sexist. Even the group's name was "United Boys...", I don't really remember how it went, but weren't girls part of it too? What about them? What about Mirushe?

Participant 3: Well, it was evident from her role that she did nothing at the end of the day.

Participant 1: Well, no, she would sew up the flags, which was a lot less than what the boys did. Either way, in all the movies I've watched, even though I haven't watched that many from the communist period, women are second-class characters, even though they started working and were supposedly equal. Even their roles in the family, I remember a character from "Dy Here Mat", the main character's mom, I think she was an engineer, had a good job. Anyway, the thing is that both she and her husband used to do the same job, but their roles at home were different. She'd tell him not to yell at their kid and he would yell back at her. Despite the general opinion in the public discourse that women used to have more rights back then, I don't see them, except for going to work and doing pretty much two jobs. They went to work and then came back home where they had to take care of their children, men didn't share any of the responsibilities.

Participant 3: Yeah, so what's different from today?

Participant 1: What's different today is that we don't go preaching around that everything has been solved, because back then, depending on where you lived and despite the fact that religion was banned, women would mourn in a separate room from men. In fact, we haven't made any progress after the '90s when it comes to discrimination because we didn't make any progress during communism, women just went to work.

Researcher: I had promised you in the information sheet as well that the discussion would only last for around 30 minutes, but before we conclude it, would you say that the opinion you have

on the communist regime is based on what you've seen in the movies, or is more related to what you've read or heard from your relatives. Often people say that they've heard this or that from their parents, but do you think that movie have played a big role in your opinion on the communist regime?

Participant 1: The theater used to be the place where the masses were educated and by seeing something, that is by interacting, people received a message. The way children learn when they are young is from images, from what they see, from stories. Of course, movies are a very effective tool to teach or indoctrinate and when I watch them, do I think they are real or am I able to tell the difference based on what I've heard? At least personally, when I watch them, I find them ridiculous. How can there be a 120% yield? The maximum efficiency, we learned it in sixth grade, is 80%. How did the communist state go beyond the laws of nature itself? It sounds ridiculous, or at least it does to me. I also find ridiculous all their efforts to find out where the weapons were, or not, just the idea that they went to war with slingshots, that seems ridiculous to me. This is compared to what I've previously heard, because yes, they did have children spy on the enemies and the guerrilla warfare is considered sacred, but even these stories don't make me think that those days were heaven on Earth.

Researcher: Anyone else wants to add something?

Participant 2: I just remembered being told that every time Kinostudio released a new film, the schools themselves would take children to watch them and therefore I think that each of these movies has a message, no matter how hidden or subtle, they still have influenced younger generations who were more vulnerable.

Researcher: Alright, since time is running out, I wanted to thank you once again for your participation. As stated in the consent form you signed, the conversation recorded will also be transcribed. In case you need a copy of the transcript or are interested in the results of the study, please write to me. Once again, many thanks for today and have a great one!

CURRICULUM VITAE

Enxhi Begvarfaj was born on 10 April 1997, in Vlora. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Finance from the University of Tirana, which she obtained in 2018, and began her graduate studies at Epoka University in 2020 in Political Science and International Relations. She has been a volunteer for different youth organizations such as AIESEC in Albania and United Nations Youth Association Albania and has worked as a coordinator for various projects targeting youth and their mobilization for a better and more informed society. She began her career at Vodafone Albania as part of the Discover Vodafone Graduate Program and ever since has worked in various positions in both business-related fields and NGOs. At the moment, her research interests include youth engagement, collective memory, and development studies.