



Pedagogies of Propaganda: The Role of Critical Articles in Shaping Social Consciousness During the Communist Regime

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Abstract

This study analyzes the role of critical articles on feature films as propaganda instruments that served to form social consciousness during the communist regime in Albania from 1961-1990. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of articles on Albanian film (N=586) with qualitative data from structured interviews (N=10) with critics, journalists, correspondents, and collaborators of Drita newspaper, one of the most influential cultural media outlets of the time. Also, the study used qualitative data derived from key documents, such as reports from the Congresses and Plenums of the Labor Party of Albania, the League of Writers and Artists, etc. The findings indicate that critical articles served not only to control and manipulate public opinion but also as a form of public education. This situation promoted censorship among creators and artists, leaving lasting consequences for how post-regime society perceives education, criticism, and authority. The study's findings may help prevent the resurgence of similar forms of control and manipulation of public opinion.

Keywords: Media Sociology, Propaganda, Public opinion, Ideology, Social consciousness, Censorship, Totalitarianism.

1. Introduction

Between 1945 and 1990, the communists who came to power in Albania adopted the Russian model of propaganda in the media to spread and consolidate Marxist-Leninist ideology for the indoctrination of the masses. The regime viewed the film as a powerful art form capable of significantly influencing the masses. Through film criticism published in the newspaper Drita, the regime aimed to shape and control public perceptions of literature and the arts, ensuring that creators and their work

remained within the ideological boundaries set by the party-state. State censorship and self-censorship by creators thus shaped the critical discourse on the film, using language and tone that aligned with the ideological constructs of the time and with the method of socialist realism. With restrictive criteria binding every work submitted for publication, this method was not a literal literary method but a blend of realistic literary principles and communist ideology (Gjecovi et al., 2008).

Three decades after the fall of communism in Albania, there is still a lack of scientific studies or empirical research on the role of the media in shaping the social consciousness, particularly the print press and specifically the cultural newspaper "Drita." This publication was significant in covering literature and the arts as propaganda for the party-state to maintain and strengthen the communist dictatorship. Consequently, the gap in understanding the media's role—especially the cultural aspects—during totalitarianism has deepened. This has left a negative legacy that undermines democracy, in which the media often becomes a supporter of authoritarian elements in power—seeing that previous studies in Albania have focused mainly on propaganda techniques, mass manipulation, and the role of the media in communism (Fuga, 2010, 2021; Vehbiu, 2007). We decided to analyze the role of critical articles on film as propaganda instruments for the party-state, identifying specific features that genuinely contributed to the fields of communication and media during the totalitarian period. Some of the research questions we aim to address through this study include: How were critical articles about film used in the newspaper "Drita" as a propaganda tool to reinforce and legitimize the policies of the communist regime in Albania from 1961 to 1990? How has film criticism evolved over different historical periods? Did critical articles influence the rise of censorship and self-censorship among creators and artists, and if so, in what ways? Did criticism serve as a means to shape social consciousness in accordance with official ideology? To address these questions, we formally state the following hypotheses:

1- *Hypothesis 1 (H1)*: Critical articles about Albanian artistic film were used as propaganda to legitimize the communist regime's policies and shape social consciousness in Albania during the 1960s-1990s.

2- *Hypothesis 2 (H2)*: Critical articles during the communist regime contributed to increased censorship and self-censorship among creators and artists (directors, screenwriters, actors, etc.).

To test the hypotheses of the study, we have relied on scientific methods consisting of a combination of empirical data obtained from the analysis of articles on Albanian film (N=586) as well as on quality data obtained from structured interviews (N=10) with critics, journalists, correspondents, and collaborators of "Drita" newspaper during the period taken in the study. We also analyzed qualitative data derived from key documents such as reports held in the Congresses and plenums of the former PPSH [Partia e Punës se Shqipërisë] Labor Party of Albania (LPA), former League of Writers and Artists, documents of the former Institute of Marxist-Leninist Studies at the KQ

[Komiteti Qendror] Central Committee (CC) of the LPA (Labor Party of Albania), etc.

Detailed analyses confirm the hypothesis that critical articles in the newspaper “Drita” played a significant role in shaping public opinion regarding Albanian socialist realist cinema. These articles were used as propaganda during Albania's communist dictatorship. While their influence on direct decision-making may have been limited, “Drita” became a powerful propaganda mechanism that shaped public perception and exerted pressure on creators and artists. Critiques published in “Drita” often acted as indirect guidelines for filmmakers, providing insights into what was expected of art and culture. They discouraged any artistic experimentation that deviated from official ideology, contributing to increasing censorship and self-censorship among artists.

This study is part of a broader study on the coverage of “Drita” newspaper of literature and arts, where, of course, the coverage of Albanian artistic film occupies a special place for the role Albanian cinematography had in indoctrinating the masses, starting from the directive where writers and artists in the communist regime were considered “party aides in the revolutionary education of the masses.” As this directive would be followed by other slogans such as “revolutionary art makes revolutionary artists whose hearts beat with the hearts of the people.” The communist slang press was often referred to as a “tool” and “weapon.” This quality was in line with the reality of the media in Albania, as they had indeed become instruments of communist propaganda and weapons for eradicating free speech (Borici & Marku, 2010).

This study is increasingly relevant in today's information and technology-driven society. Its findings aim to highlight a crucial aspect of digital communication that warns against and prevents the return of control and manipulation of public opinion in support of authoritarian power.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical article as a journalistic genre and propaganda instrument – Concepts and Research Studies

Although critical articles are one of the oldest and most widely praised genres of journalism, there is no universal definition of them. Russmohl (2010) describes critical articles as a unique form of review in the cultural realm, including theatre, film, concerts, and books. In a critical article, the primary focus is on the commentary, which constitutes the main part of the writing. These articles are often seen as synonymous with reports and comments within the cultural field as they relate to evaluating artistic creativity. The content typically balances factual reporting with professional observation and interpretation while incorporating personal and subjective insights. Criticism must be conducted based on professional expertise.

Kosumi (2019) defines an analytical article as a journalistic genre that intertwines information and analysis. In contrast, a review is a critical text focused on a book or an art exhibition tailored for the daily media consumer. The subjects of reviews are

limited to literary works and various art forms, including theatre, cinema, painting, sculpture, and music. Furthermore, Kosumi argues that reviews carry an authoritarian nature because their value is tied to the authority of their authors. According to Mast (2018), criticism and reviews serve two primary purposes. Firstly, they function as recommendations for audiences, helping them decide whether to attend a specific show or to avoid it. Secondly, this form of commentary can foster artistic creativity. Kosumi (2019) emphasizes that a key characteristic of reviews is their ability to shape public perception of an artistic work, thereby influencing its reputation as either positive or negative—an aspect closely linked to marketing.

Randall (2003) presents a review divided into three schools of thought, two of which he argues should not exist. The first is the school of professional journalists. While they excel at reporting events, they often feel compelled to showcase their writing skills when reviewing books, dramas, films, or concerts, which can detract from the quality of their critiques. The second school consists of amateurs, who are often rivals or even friends of the authors whose work they are reviewing. This group tends to blur the lines between personal relationships and public critique, leading to reviews that may confuse or mislead readers. Randall posits that the only school worth preserving focuses on providing accurate information about the work being reviewed. This approach emphasizes a precise description of the work, including examining its style, content, and underlying ideas.

In the case of Albania, the organization of communist media followed the Soviet model (Borici & Marku, 2010), meaning that the role of criticism served more as propaganda than as a means of informing the public. In this context, critic Abazi, a journalist for the newspaper “Drita” during the communist era, one of the interviewers for the study's purpose, notes that critical articles were not necessarily beneficial, even though they were presented as such. While these articles may have displayed a greater depth of thought, they were essentially tailored reviews rather than genuine critiques. Journalism during that time was mainly about addressing issues in the press. It primarily revolved around a genre known in journalistic practice as 'problem writing,' which blended elements of opinion, commentary, analysis, and investigative journalism. As it is understood today, publication analysis was largely absent (Elezi, 2015). In a totalitarian society, Fuga (2010) explains that journalism embodies both conformity and criticism, but only to the extent permitted by those in power. In this critical sense, journalists serve the authority they are meant to scrutinize. Fuga (2010) further posits that journalism, whether acting merely as a mouthpiece for the ruling politics or engaging in criticism, ultimately serves the interests of those in power. Notably, when journalists offer critique, they can wield considerable influence over people's lives, particularly those of political elites. Readers, too, play a role as enforcers; many were staunch party loyalists, politically and ideologically indoctrinated to the extent that they could detect any ideological deviations among journalists. They would voice their grievances in the “Letters from the People” section, a common feature in newspapers (Borici & Marku, 2010).

2.2 Pedagogies of Propaganda in Totalitarian Systems

The propaganda and mass communication systems established in totalitarian regimes play a vital role in sustaining the regime's authority. They strip individuals of their humanity and undermine their capacity for independent thought and judgment (Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1956). This is also reinforced by Walter Lippmann's theory on the role of the media in shaping social consciousness. According to Lippmann (1922, 1925), the media construct social reality through images, stereotypes and the selection of information, making public opinion vulnerable to propaganda and ideological manipulation. This approach is in line with the analysis of Jacques Ellul (1973), who conceives propaganda as a long-term pedagogical and psychological process, aiming not only at persuasion, but also at the integration of the individual into the ideological order through propaganda messages. Meanwhile, Chomsky and Herman's (1988) propaganda model expands this perspective by showing that the media functions as an ideological institution/apparatus that produces and maintains "consensus" for the interests of political power, even without the use of direct violence. According to the totalitarianism expert, Arendt (2002), propaganda and terror are two facets of the same phenomenon in totalitarian states. Sparks (2000), in his examination of communism, capitalism, and mass media, elucidates the significant role of mass media within the framework of totalitarianism. He argues that mass media serves as a vital mechanism through which the governing group's symbolic universe is disseminated and normalized. These media outlets are essential tools in the totalitarian agenda, functioning effectively only when they succeed. From a formal perspective, media in totalitarian systems operate like an orchestra within the realm of propaganda, ensuring that the entire system and its channels of communication align coherently with the propaganda being disseminated (Marku, 2024). Fuga (2010) explores the concept of collective mentality within the Albanian context, drawing on the insights of international theorists such as Arendt (2002), Aron (1968), Ellul (1973), and Katz (1957). These theorists highlight that propaganda manipulation arises only when there is mutual intent from both the manipulator and the manipulated. Fuga observes that certain totalitarian movements initially garnered significant popular support, only to later disappoint their followers through violence and dictatorial governance. He relates this dynamic to the influence of patriarchy, which he argues has been a defining ideology in shaping media and propaganda in Albania (Fuga, 2010, p. 27–28).

3. Research Design

The study utilizes a combination of quantitative and qualitative scientific methods, specifically content analysis and discourse analysis. Content analysis builds on the classical communication process model introduced by Lasswell (1948), structured into five main questions: Who communicates? What is said? By what means? To whom is it addressed? And with what effect? This method has helped understand how

propaganda messages/content are structured and distributed in the articles of Drita newspaper to influence public opinion at the time. Lasswell's (1948) systematic method has been applied to encode data to uncover recurring propaganda topics, patterns, and techniques. This method enables comparisons across different historical periods. Its use of well-defined criteria and combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis ensures high objectivity.

This study investigates how critical articles in Drita functioned as ideological tools between 1961 and 1990. For this, we have mainly relied on discourse analysis, grounded in a comprehensive theoretical framework articulated by Foucault (1969), Van Dijk (1993), and Fairclough (1995), and Chomsky and Herman (1988). This approach aims to uncover how specific messages are situated within their social and political contexts, with the goal of influencing or manipulating public opinion. Hence, we initially conducted a content analysis to identify patterns, followed by a discourse analysis to interpret selected texts.

A. Data Sources and Sampling: Articles from "Drita"

Three decades after the fall of communism in Albania, several scientific studies have examined authoritarian propaganda techniques (Fuga, 2010, 2021; Vehbiu, 2007). However, there remains a lack of empirical research specifically addressing the role of media, particularly critical articles in the cultural newspaper Drita, in covering literature and the arts as propaganda tools for the Party-State during the years 1961-1990. This study aims to provide comprehensive insights into how critical articles on feature films in Drita served as instruments of propaganda and influenced the rise of censorship and self-censorship among artists during the communist regime. The findings will offer valuable perspectives to inform discussions regarding similar challenges in the current context of the information society and technology. The study sample is derived from an extensive examination of all issues of the Drita newspaper published over a 30-year period (1961-1990), specifically focusing on 1,635 articles related to Albanian feature films. A total of 586 articles were analyzed, organized into six historical periods: 1961-1965, 1966-1970, 1971-1975, 1976-1980, 1981-1985, and 1986-1990. Articles were selected based on explicit references to film content, ideological framing, or critical commentary, with preference given to those featuring evaluative or normative language. The division into these historical periods was primarily guided by the Congresses of the Former Labor Party of Albania, which provided the five-year plans that served as key orientation materials. These documents outlined the main directives for political, economic, and socio-cultural developments, as well as the ideological framework.

B. Data Sources and Sampling: Interviews with Key Informants

To achieve the study's objective, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with filmmakers, journalists, or collaborators from Drita newspaper during the research period. There were several reasons for gathering the perspectives of these creators and journalists. First, 33 years have passed since the fall of the communist regime in

Albania, and these individuals now have the freedom to share their experiences from that time. Second, three decades provide ample opportunity for reflection on their part. The study also consulted first-hand documents from the periods in question, drawn from the Albanian State Archive and the Archive of Albanian Film. These served as a reference point for conducting interviews and as an instrument to interpret quantitative and qualitative data obtained from monitoring articles and in-depth interviews with filmmakers and journalists. Among the interviewees are former editors and contributors to *Drita* (i.e., Arben Kallamata, Xhezair Abazi, Rudolf Marku, Briseida Mema, Josif Papagjoni), scholars of communication and media studies (i.e., Artan Fuga, Mark Marku, Ardian Vehbiu), a filmmaker active during the period (Besnik Bisha), and a former official in the press and propaganda office of the Party of Labor of Albania (Bashkim Hoxha). The interviews addressed themes such as the structure and editorial practices of *Drita*; the relationship between censorship and self-censorship; techniques of propaganda and ideological control in journalism; and the personal and professional consequences of deviating from the party line. Each interview followed a structured format with tailored open-ended questions, allowing for both comparability and contextual depth. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to extract qualitative insights into how *Drita* operated as a vehicle of cultural propaganda. All articles and interviews were conducted in Albanian. English translations of selected excerpts are provided in the manuscript and footnotes, while original-language references are cited in full.

C. Research Questions

This paper aims to answer the following research questions with the aim of discovering how critical articles on artistic film in the newspaper *Drita* served as propaganda instruments during the communist regime that stretched from 1961 to 1990:

- 1) What position does the critical article hold in the newspaper *Drita* compared to other genres?
- 2) In what ways has film criticism evolved throughout the historical periods covered in the study?
- 3) How did these factors influence the promotion of censorship imposed by those in power, as well as the self-censorship practiced by creators and artists?

4. Data Collection Procedures

A. Article Collection and Preparation

As part of a broader scientific initiative titled "Legacy of the Newspaper *Drita* 1961-1990," researchers compiled a file to serve as a research instrument. This project was a collaborative effort between the Department of Journalism and Communication and the Department of Literature at the Faculty of History-Philology at the University of Tirana. The file was created to quantify the number of articles published in *Drita*

Newspaper related to feature films. Thus, the data obtained from this file plays a crucial role in uncovering how “Drita’s” content, particularly critical articles and reviews on feature films, functioned as a propaganda tool during the communist regime. It also examines the evolution of criticism and its impact on fostering censorship and self-censorship among journalists in various historical contexts covered by the study.

The file was organized into two sections. The first section records issue-level metadata, including publication date, newspaper number, page numbers, and year of publication. The second section captures article-specific variables, such as whether the article appeared on the front page or on other pages, the article's page number, the title, word count, whether the article is visually accompanied, the genre of writing, the title of the film discussed, and the authorship of the piece. This structure was designed not only to collect quantitative data but also to facilitate comparative analysis across historical periods, fulfilling the objectives of the study.

B. Interview Collection and Preparation

To gain deeper insight into the editorial and social function of the media, focusing here on “Drita”, we conducted 10 in-depth interviews with professionals who had direct involvement or experience with the newspaper. Interviews were conducted in Albanian, the native language of both the interviewers and the interviewees, either in person or via video conferencing, between Jul and December 2024 in Tirana, Albania's capital. Interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length and followed a semi-structured protocol, with tailored open-ended questions that addressed the participant's specific role, expertise, or lived experience. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

5. Analysis and Results

5.1. Thematic Analysis of the Newspaper Articles

We have conducted content analysis by reading the newspaper articles and identifying codes and themes of the content covered in the relevant articles. Drawing from the principles of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1993), the analytical part of this study examines the content through which film criticism served the objectives of state propaganda. Following the thematic coding of all the newspaper articles and triangulation with ten interviews and archival documents, several key propaganda-related themes emerged. We summarize the relevant themes as follows:

a. **Art and Criticism as Instruments of Ideological Education:** This theme focuses on the emphasis that art is not independent; art is a medium of the ideologies of the Party, or Marxism-Leninism, and of the leader, E. Hoxha. Art is portrayed as an educator of the masses toward these ideologies, and this is evident in quotes like “Arti i realizmit socialist është një art që lufton për të ardhmen e njerëzimit.” (Translation: “The art of socialist realism is an art that fights for the future of humanity.”) or

“Letërsia dhe arti, duhet të ecin përpara në rrugën e partisë, pasurohen çdo ditë e më shumë.” (Translation: “Literature and art must move forward along the Party’s path, becoming richer every day.”)

b. *The Centrality of the Party and the Working Class:* The Party, and especially, the leader of the Party, E. Hoxha, is consistently portrayed as the supreme guide for artists. This is evident in quotes like “Uniteti i shkrimtarëve e artistëve me çështjen e popullit dhe të partisë është i pathyeshëm.” (Translation: “The unity of writers and artists with the cause of the people and the Party is unbreakable.”)

c. *Criticism as a Tool for Disciplining Artistic Production:* the propaganda urges artists not to deviate from the ideology of the party, even at the expense of the artistic spirit. Sample quotes include: “Ka ardhë koha të ndalemi në problemin e kritikës.” (Translation: “The time has come to stop and address the problem of criticism.”) or “Në art nuk lejohen thirrje që të shmangin rrugën ideologjike të partisë.” (Translation: “In art, calls that divert from the Party’s ideological path are not allowed.”)

d. *Rejection of Formalism and Individualism:* articles state the danger of parting from the ideology of communism and what it stands for. By rejecting anything modern, individualistic, or aesthetic, “Drita’s” propaganda seeks to eliminate those ideologies by urging artists not to embrace individual thought but to serve as transmitters of already approved doctrines. A sample of this can be found in quotes like “Në letërsi e art nuk lejohen ‘thirrje’.” (Translation: “In literature and art, ‘calls’ [i.e., expressions] that diverge are not permitted.”)

5.2 Criticism as an instrument of propaganda and evolution during historical periods

In this section, we combine the qualitative and quantitative data to support our research aims. Transcripts of the in-depth interviews with the experts of “Drita” were reviewed for accuracy and thematically coded using a deductive-inductive approach, combining a predefined coding framework based on the research objectives with emergent themes derived from the data. Excerpts quoted in the analysis were translated into English for the article, with the original Albanian text available from the authors. We identified themes around the internal structure and editorial decision-making processes of Drita; the relationship between censorship and self-censorship; the use of journalism and film criticism as tools of ideological enforcement; the long-term professional and personal consequences of deviation from the Party line; and reflections on post-communist memory and media legacy.

The data from the newspapers were analyzed using SPSS version 21 and STATA, both of which are effective software tools for conducting quantitative data analysis, including descriptive and factor analyses. The results were interpreted in accordance with the study’s objectives and the research questions posed.

The data in Table 1 indicate that the period from 1986 to 1990 had the highest percentage of published articles, accounting for 21.7% of the total. During this time,

the average annual output of cinematic productions was 14 feature films (Gjika, 2009 p.181). Following this, the second-highest percentage of articles was recorded for the period from 1976 to 1980, comprising 21.3% of the total. This coincided with a peak in artistic film production, notably in 1979, when 16 films were produced. Conversely, the period from 1961 to 1965 saw the lowest percentage of published articles, at just 5.6%, which reflects the early stages of Albanian cinematography. These statistics illustrate that the publication of articles on feature films closely corresponded to production trends in Albanian cinema.

Table 1. Articles for Feature Film in the Newspaper Drita, by Historical Periods, 1961-1990

Historical Period	Nr. Articles	%
1961-1965 (The 3 rd 5-year-plan)	33	5.6%
1966-1970 (The 4 th 5-year-plan)	58	9.9%
1971-1975 (The 5 th 5-year-plan)	120	20.5%
1976-1980 (The 6 th 5-year-plan)	125	21.3%
1981-1985 (The 7 th 5-year-plan)	123	21.0%
1986-1990 (The 8 th 5-year-plan)	127	21.7%
<i>Total</i>	<i>586</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

In terms of genre, monitoring data indicates that the most highly regarded category from 1961 to 1990 is the critical article/review, accounting for 57% of the total. This is followed by 'News,' which contributes 10.9% (see Table 2). These figures highlight the significant role that critical film articles played compared to other journalistic genres, serving not only as a primary source of critique but also as a tool for propaganda in support of the communist regime.

Table 2. Genre of Items in %, Period 1961-1990

Genre of Writing	Nr.	%
Critical article	334	57.0%
Editorial	8	1.4%
Speeches	22	3.8%
Interview	34	5.8%
Chronicle	60	10.2%
News	64	10.9%
Profile	21	3.6%
Referate (Lead-off Report)	9	1.5%
Opinion	4	0.7%
Conversation/Talk	3	0.5%
Report	3	0.5%
News Report/Reportage	2	0.3%
Notes	2	0.3%
Other	20	3.4%
Total	586	100.0%

The role and task of criticism are clearly expressed in the article published in October 1965 titled "On the Rise of the Role of Literature and the Arts in the Communist Education of the Masses," which, among other things, states: "We need a deeply principled and partisan critique, for a critique to resolutely defend Marxist-Leninist principles in the field of art and literature, to strike every foreign manifestation of our ideology and morality, to support and support that which is sound, revolutionary, that which militates for the party line and serves the communist education of the masses. It goes on to emphasize that 'Our criticism must expose revisionist views in art and reveal their falseness, decay and danger' (Drita, 31.10.1965, p.3). The realization of this mission was first assigned to the literary press, specifically to the newspaper Drita, which had to fight "to raise the role and importance of criticism, its principle and truthfulness, to be concerned with the growth of new cadres of critics, for the development of Marxist aesthetics, for the right orientation of criticism" (Drita,

31.10.1965, p.3).

The data indicate that the trend of critical articles fluctuates across historical periods (see Table 3). The period with the lowest percentage of critical articles, 3.3% of the total, occurs between 1961 and 1965, coinciding with the early stages of Albanian cinematography when film production remained relatively low compared to other periods. Throughout this time, most articles published in "Drita" reflect the directives of the IV Congress of the LPA, particularly the main objective outlined in the 3rd Five-Year Plan: "raise the material and cultural level of the workers' masses".

Critical articles on films produced during this period reflected elements of professional criticism; they discussed film flaws, though caution was taken to ensure the criticism aligned with the ideological framework of the time. For example, in the critical article on the film 'Our Land' alongside some technical-professional aspects such as the poverty of the world of characters, the fragmented film, etc., the concern is that the film was not well realized from a political point of view, was not deepened enough in the circumstances of the great transformations brought by the people's power and the agrarian reform in 1946 because ... "We don't see in the faces of the villagers that something extraordinary is happening and exactly what would trigger the drama the film was made for" (Kuqali, 1964, p.2; 4).

The period from 1966 to 1970 saw a modest increase in critical articles, rising to 6.6% of total output, compared with the preceding period. This shift can be attributed to the directives of the ruling party, the growth in film production, and an enhancement in the ideo-artistic standards of the time. Additionally, there was an expectation for artistic works to embody a sense of partiality. An article published in April 1970, titled "Lenin and Proletarian Party-ism in Art," emphasized that "every literary and artistic work must be assessed according to the Latin proverb: cui prodest - who benefits from it," asserting that writers and artists cannot be considered "superhuman" and cannot exist or create outside the interests of their class (Kallulli, 1970, p.1; 5).

The historical period from 1971 to 1975, while accounting for only 14.1% of the total number of critical articles—fewer than in other periods—was marked by significant political developments with cultural implications, as extensively reflected in the newspaper Drita. During this time, official documents called for further revolutionization of literature and art. In the pages of the newspaper from 1971 to 1972, a notable series of critical articles on Albanian film was published, showcasing a range of conflicting ideas and attitudes.

In an article published in June 1971, director M. Luarasi highlighted the absence of professional film criticism. He observed that directors, screenwriters, and operators who were recognized for their contributions were not fulfilling their roles as critics and literary commentators on the art. The authors noted that a true cinematic critic, in the proper sense of the term, was lacking. According to him, "the writings that are published in newspapers and magazines are only reviews of some benefit, but they do not touch the idea and aesthetic essence of this art" (Luarasi, 1971, p.5; 6). Then,

Luarasi spoke of the danger of elevating mediocrity to the pedestal. The director furthered the idea that it should be the film's own employees, directors, screenwriters, operators, etc., who should make the film critical, while “the activation that is done by the press to the opinion of the masses for the film through writings by the spectators or by letters, impressions, and other forms is necessary and very useful, but it does not replace it and it does not constitute professional criticism, deeply principled and with demands of highly artistic ideas” (Luarasi, 1971, p.5; 6).

Unlike M. Luarasi, director V. Gjika stated that “professional cinematographic criticism will be formed by attracting and activating as many people, employees of different fields, and simultaneously from the ranks of literary artists and literary critics, who always discuss among themselves about films, merits, and especially shortcomings” (Gjika, 1971, p.6).

Table 3. Genre of Articles in %, by Historical Periods

Journalistic Genre	Historical Period 1961-1965	Historical Period 1966-1970	Historical Period 1971-1975	Historical Period 1976-1980	Historical Period 1981-1985	Historical Period 1986-1990	Total
Critical Article	3.3%	6.6%	14.1%	27.3%	20.7%	27.9%	100%
Editorial	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	62.5%	12.5%	100.0%
Published Speeches	18.2%	13.6%	13.6%	9.1%	18.2%	27.3%	100.0%
Interview	0.0%	0.0%	11.8%	23.5%	38.2%	26.5%	100.0%
Chronicle	11.7%	18.3%	43.3%	8.3%	6.7%	11.7%	100.0%
News	10.9%	9.4%	25.0%	17.2%	23.4%	14.1%	100.0%
Profile	0.0%	19.0%	33.3%	14.3%	23.8%	9.5%	100.0%
Published Lead-off Report	37.5%	25.0%	37.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Opinion	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%

Talks	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	100.0 %
Report	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0 %
News Report/Reportage	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0 %
Notes	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0 %
Others	5.0%	15.0%	30.0%	15.0%	30.0%	5.0%	100.0 %

The year 1973 marks the end of artistic freedom and the beginning of a fierce state campaign against art and culture in the country, culminating in the IV Plenum of the former LPA, CC, held in June this year. In the report 'Deepening the Ideological Struggle Against Foreign Manifestations and liberal attitudes towards them' by E. Hoxha pointed out that in the field of literature, art, and culture, some influences of foreign bourgeois and revisionist ideology were observed and that liberal attitudes were taken towards them, which according to E. Hoxha 'had dimmed the democratic and national nature of our art and had negatively affected the tastes of the masses, especially the youth.' According to E. Hoxha, those responsible for the created situation were also the leaders of the former League of Writers and Artists, who had not fought in time the liberal and modernist tendencies that had affected the press, including the newspaper "Drita" (Gjecovi et al., 2008). During this period, the weakening of professional criticism and the increase in critical propaganda articles supporting the policy in force are observed.

The historical period 1976–1980 is the second-highest in terms of the number of critical articles, accounting for 27.3% of the total. The Echo of Plenum IV of the former CC, LPA, and the speech of E. Hoxha on December 20, 1974, would appear for nearly a decade in articles published in the newspaper; the themes of the film, where the emphasis would be placed on the deepening of ideological struggle against foreign shows and liberal attitudes towards them, the positive hero, strengthening the principle of Marxist-Leninist partisanship and worldview, the ideo-aesthetic education of the masses of workers, the education of the new man with the Marxist-Leninist worldview, with the norms of communist morality; the war against bureaucracy, etc.

The temporal span from 1981 to 1985, characterized by 20.7% of critical articles, may be interpreted as a continuation of the trends observed in the two preceding historical periods. This alignment suggests a persistent thematic or discursive trajectory in

critical analysis during this timeframe. Between 1986 and 1990, the highest percentage of critical articles emerged, accounting for 27.9% of the total. During this period, cinema production stabilized as the transformative era that began with the Third Congress of the League of Writers and Artists in 1984 started to yield tangible results. The Congress emphasized that artistic values should serve as the primary criterion for evaluating artistic works and awarding prizes to artists. Following the death of dictator E. Hoxha in 1985, a more liberal atmosphere emerged in the press, alongside a rise in professional criticism.

However, despite the percentage of highly critical articles in specific historical periods, it should be considered that these figures do not necessarily always show the quality of criticism in professional terms. According to literary critic Kallulli (2002, p.314), with minor exclusions, criticism (literary-artistic) has been the servant of monism for ten consecutive years." Something fruitful started to look like in the early 1960s and then the early 1970s, but nonetheless, the multitone oppressive roller of wild and overly diabolical bureaucracy smoothed out and flattened both artistic and critical trends."

5.3 Impact of criticism of increasing censorship and self-censorship on creators

A significant majority, comprising 86.6% of the total published articles, is attributed to anonymous editorial authorship, while 8.2% of the articles are authored by correspondents affiliated with Drita newspaper. Furthermore, only 5.1% of the articles can be credited to external collaborators of the publication (refer to Table 4).

Table 4: Article Authorship in Percentage, period 1961-1990

Author of articles	Articles in %
Newsroom	86.6%
Drita Newspaper correspondent	8.2%
External associate	5.1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0%</i>

Data indicate that 89.2% of critical articles are authored by the editorial office and remain anonymous (see Table 5). Fuga (2024) elaborates that these unnamed editorial articles provide the necessary direction, operating under the influence of editorial policy. He emphasizes that this constrained editorial line leaves little room for independence or movement. Moreover, he notes that while there was conscious censorship stemming from fear, an element of unconscious self-censorship also played a role.

Filmmaker B. Bisha, in an interview conducted for this purpose, notes that "critical articles" served not only as tools of propaganda in support of the regime of the time

but also aimed to instill fear among artists, contributing to an increase in self-censorship. He further explains that the activation of these critical articles in the press during the era of renowned cinema was “primarily a means of self-protection, bolstering one's position amidst the regime's onslaughts. Reflecting the ebbs and flows of class struggle—which never truly faded away, even as it sometimes stilled and sometimes surged—self-censorship mirrored this movement. It was more than just self-censorship; it stemmed from genuine fear, as the consequences were severe.” These insights from Bisha underline even further how internalized pressure and the threats and fear of repercussions from misaligning with the communist ideology of the party. This testimony provides further support for the role of the “Drita” newspaper critical articles as a propaganda tool and mechanism of coercion.

Table 5: Genres by Authorship, Period 1961-1990

Genre Type	External associate	Newspaper correspondent	Newsroom	Total
Critical article	8.1%	2.7%	89.2%	100.0%
Editorial	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Published speeches	0.0%	9.1%	90.9%	100.0%
Interview	0.0%	5.9%	94.1%	100.0%
Chronicle	0.0%	23.3%	76.7%	100.0%
News	0.0%	26.6%	73.4%	100.0%
Profile	4.8%	9.5%	85.7%	100.0%
Published Lead-off Report	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Opinion	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Conversation/Talk	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Report	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	100.0%
News Report/Reportage	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Notes	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Other	5.0%	10.0%	85.0%	100.0%

Another genre that emerged during the totalitarian regime was the anonymous Open Letters, categorized under 'Other.' These letters served a dual purpose: on one hand, they acted as tools for the propaganda of the ruling regime, while on the other hand, they functioned as instruments of intimidation against artists. This latter function fostered a culture of self-censorship among creators and artists. Moreover, many anonymous letters originated from within the artistic community, with creators sending messages to one another, notes Bashkim Hoxha, one of our interviewers.

Censorship in Albania has historically manifested in multifaceted ways, lacking a singular nomenclature. This phenomenon was not centralized within a solitary institution; rather, it encompassed numerous offices tasked with overseeing and controlling the dissemination of information. Furthermore, censorship was not the responsibility of a single individual; it involved a diverse array of censors operating across various spheres of influence (Marku, 1991).

6. Discussion

The media, particularly through the newspaper "Drita," played a crucial role in shaping public opinion regarding Albanian cinematography within the framework of socialist realism during the communist dictatorship in Albania. While its influence on direct decision-making appears somewhat limited, "Drita" emerged as a formidable propaganda tool that shaped public perceptions and exerted pressure on creators and artists.

The role of the Drita newspaper as a vehicle for promoting the principles of socialist realism and supporting the ruling party's ideological stance manifested in two primary ways. First, it involved promoting ideological norms and glorifying works that aligned with these standards, primarily through critical articles. Second, it included severe criticism and moral condemnation of any deviations from the accepted frameworks, using the same genre of critical articles. Critical articles published in the newspaper Drita frequently served as implicit guidelines for cinematographers, delineating prevailing expectations for art and culture. These articles not only articulated the parameters of acceptable artistic expression but also actively discouraged any experimental tendencies that deviated from the established official ideology. Thus, Drita served as both a barometer of cultural standards and a mechanism for reinforcing conformity within the artistic community.

Criticism represented the most ideologically advanced segment of the institution within the literary and cultural system. It played a crucial role in controlling literature and the arts, serving as the 'guardian dog' of ideology in relation to literary and artistic works. Operating under the strict authority of the propaganda system overseen by the former Central Committee, criticism was often dismissive of writers, evaluating all literary works against the principles of socialist realism, which instilled a sense of fear among authors. This environment fostered strong self-censorship; writers learned to carefully navigate what to express and what to avoid, often leading to a situation in which their thoughts went unvoiced, concluded one of the interviewers.

In the intricate relationship between media and art, Drita newspaper serves not only as a cultural outlet but also as a mechanism of ideological control that has helped maintain the status quo. It has directed artistic creativity towards the regime's propaganda objectives. Within this framework, media framing emerges as a potent tool for shaping public narratives and fostering a climate of censorship while simultaneously imposing stringent ideological constraints.

The repercussions of the totalitarian system persist long after the fall of the communist regime. Today, the notion of inner fear—an emotion individuals feel compelled to hide within society—endures, largely stemming from an extended period of repression. These effects extend beyond writers and artists, influencing the cultural values we produce today and manifest within society as a pervasive form of social conformism. This conformism, particularly among elites, facilitates a troubling acceptance of malevolence, driven by a deep-seated fear of expressing one's thoughts. Consequently, this leads to a culture characterized by non-reaction and a lack of critical thinking, with dire consequences for society at large.

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