American adult-film star Marilyn Chambers. This compilation incorporated sketches, musical numbers, lesbian fantasy sequences, a nude disco competition, and archival footage of well-known figures, including Marilyn Monroe, Joanna Lumley, Jacqueline Bisset, and Jayne Mansfield's bath scene from *Promises! Promises!* (1963). Released theatrically in the United Kingdom in 1982 with an X certificate, and subsequently on VHS in 1983, the film further cemented the brand's visibility.

Figure 1: Promotional cover art for *Electric Blue*.

Across its run, *Electric Blue* featured prominent adult performers such as Ginger Lynn, Traci Lords, Christy Canyon, Sasha Gabor, Blake Palmer, Janey Robbins, Rick Savage, and Hustler model Gail Harris. Following the conclusion of its UK production in the mid-1980s, the series found renewed life on the Playboy Channel between 1983 and 1987 and was distributed internationally in North America, Australia, and New Zealand. These versions were often localized to highlight American performers, illustrating the franchise's adaptability to different markets. In retrospect, *Electric Blue* exemplifies a transitional moment in adult entertainment: the convergence of print and live erotica with mass-market audiovisual formats, and the shift toward more accessible, consumer-driven erotic media.

In the late 1980s the series was transmitted by the *Radio-Television Beograd*(RTB) channel Beograde 2.

13 Yugoslavia and its Erotic TV Scene

In contrast to Albania's blanket bans and signal-jamming, or prudent cinema(Williams 2012) Yugoslavia cultivated a noticeably more permissive broadcast climate by the late socialist period. By New Year's Eve 1989, TV Zagreb

openly advertised late-night "18+" programming on its Third Channel (Z3), indicating an established practice of adult-rated content in broadcast slots after midnight *TV Zagreb New Year's Eve Programming Schedule* 1989. This atmosphere aligned with a broader media ecology in which erotic material circulated with fewer taboos—artists even reused clips "from pornographic movies recorded from private Italian television programmes" Crowley 2015, a reminder that Yugoslav viewers routinely accessed soft-porn content via both domestic late-night TV and spillover from nearby private channels. Within months of socialism's end, Belgrade's new third channel (3K TV) was scheduling *erotski film* and provoking a public debate that, in practice, normalized such broadcasts in the TV grid—an evolution building directly on late-1980s precedents *Belgrade 3K TV Programming Schedules* 1990. Against this backdrop of adult press and popular culture (e.g., the widely read weekly *Start* with nude centerfolds), Yugoslav television's tolerance for erotic cinema–especially in post-prime, late-night slots–stood in stark relief to Albania's tightly policed media sphere Start *Magazine Archives* 1969–1991.

14 Electric Shivers Down Albania

> we followed [the erotic films] greedily, in secrecy, and with the stubbornness of teenagers chasing the forbidden and the mysterious, back in the late nights of the 1980s on Yugoslav television channels.(Bishka 2011)

While Electric Blue is often remembered as a commercial venture in softcore erotica, its role extended far beyond entertainment. In a covert geopolitical twist, this British series was instrumental in undermining the Albanian communist regime under Enver Hoxha and his successors.

Broadcast late at night through Yugoslav state media, Electric Blue served as a psychological weapon to erode the legitimacy of Albania's isolated Stalinist system. This operation, blending cultural subversion with technological ingenuity, highlights how soft power and softcore erotica content could dismantle authoritarian structures.

15 The Covert Transmission: Bypassing Albanian Jamming with British Technology

In the 1980s, Albania remained one of the most isolated nations in Europe, with the communist regime enforcing strict bans on foreign media to preserve ideological purity. Radio and TV signals from abroad were jammed, and possession of foreign broadcasts could lead to severe punishment. However, a clandestine collaboration between British intelligence and Yugoslav authorities circumvented these barriers.

Utilizing a state-of-the-art high-powered antenna–repurposed from a former military radar in the Echelon network, NATO's eavesdropping system targeting Eastern Europe–the transmissions originated from Yugoslav state media towers. This antenna, provided by British operatives, amplified signals to penetrate Albanian jamming efforts. Yugoslavia, under its non-aligned socialist system,

had a more liberal media landscape and access to Western content, including Electric Blue episodes acquired through international distribution channels.

The broadcasts aired late at night, exploiting Albania's geographical proximity to Yugoslavia. As TV sets became increasingly common in Albanian households—crossing a critical threshold of accessibility in the mid-1980s—viewers tuned in using makeshift receivers. This not only delivered the erotic content but also fostered underground networks of electronic knowledge transfer by Yugoslav and British secret services.

Drawing from smuggled diagrams from international truck drivers and port workers, and word-of-mouth instructions, Albanians built simple anti-jamming devices like homemade antennas (often called "canaçe" in local lore). These DIY innovations, inspired by the resilient signals, empowered citizens to access forbidden media, planting seeds of technical defiance against the regime.

16 Eroding Morale: Nighttime Broadcasts and the Exhausted Proletariat

> "Electric Blue was a program that profoundly stirred Albanian youth in the final years of communism. Albania was a vast prison—a prison of hormones and testosterone. Young people were looking for an escape, and this came through Yugoslav television. We would steal the signal with the famous tin can, to glimpse another world—a world that had been forbidden to us."[Interview 1](Elian Tanini 2025)

> The night I saw Electric Blue for the first time felt like a ritual. I unscrewed the bulb in the hall so the light wouldn't be noticed. At 1:30 a.m., the announcement came on: "Program for Adults." Then, "Erotski Film." At that moment, I felt a total hormonal lockdown. Watching it today, the film isn't worth a dime, but back then it was liberation.[Interview 1](Elian Tanini 2025)

The strategic timing of Electric Blue broadcasts—at the witching hours when most Albanians should have been asleep—aimed directly at the communist ethos of disciplined labor. The regime glorified the proletariat as tireless builders of socialism, with workers and pupils expected to rise early for factory shifts or school indoctrination. By luring viewers into late-night sessions of titillating content, the series induced sleep deprivation, sapping the energy needed for ideological fervor.

> This affected especially the military. As one interviewer, serving at the border as a soldier, recalls:
>
> In 1989, when I was doing my military service in Çërravë, Pogradec, the signal from Belgrade came in so clearly that no additional equipment was needed. In fact, even Albanian Television itself did not come through as well as the Yugoslav channel.
>
> In the military unit, I was in charge of the culture hall. One room had books and propaganda to be discussed every morning, while

> the other had a television. That was where I had my first encounter with Electric Blue. I watched it alone, at night, with the windows covered by blankets. It was an intense feeling—unforgettable!
>
> Word spread through the unit. On the last day of June, the whole unit—30 men–dropped everything to watch the film. One friend of mine, who was on guard duty at the artillery, watched it from outside, through the window. The duty officer that night happened to be home for the weekend. We were all "Brothers in Arms."
>
> The next day, I wasn't feeling well. We had only some bread and the water from boiled beans–if you were lucky, you might catch a bean or two. I was very weak. We all were. The Yugoslav soldiers on the other side of the border called us "zombies" and laughed at us.[Interview 1](Elian Tanini 2025)

Workers, bleary-eyed after glimpsing glamorous British models and erotic sketches, arrived at their posts fatigued and distracted. Pupils, sneaking views on family TVs, struggled with concentration during Party-mandated lessons. This subtle sabotage destroyed communist morale, transforming the vaunted Albanian worker into a yawning symbol of regime inefficiency. As productivity dipped and absenteeism rose, the broadcasts exposed the hypocrisy of a system that demanded unwavering dedication while failing to provide even basic comforts.

Figure 2: Television *Electric Blue*.

As a worker recalls:

> I remember coming to work after a night spent watching *Electric Blue*. My eyes were heavy, my thoughts drifting back to the images I had seen. The machines in the factory seemed to move in slow motion, and my hands felt clumsy. We joked about being "infected

> by the blue," but in truth, we were simply exhausted. The foreman noticed our lack of focus, yet no one dared reveal the real reason. It was as if the entire shift was under a spell—half-awake, half-dreaming of another world. Productivity slipped, and the usual discipline dissolved. For that day, the forbidden broadcasts had altered us. [Interview 2]

17 Shattering Social Fabric: Redefining Women in Albanian Society

Albania's traditional values, reinforced by communist puritanism, positioned women as equal comrades in labor but shielded them from objectification. Electric Blue's portrayal of women as empowered yet sensual figures—through centrefolds, nude competitions, and fantasy sequences—challenged this narrative. Viewers, particularly men, began seeing female co-workers not as revolutionary partners but as objects of lust, fostering workplace tensions and gossip.

> Working at the lathe, I could think only of Elio Petri's *La classe operaia va in paradiso* ("The Working Class Goes to Heaven")—one screw, one ass. [Interview 4]

> And the breasts, men... I had seen them before, of course, but never in this size, this shape–like watermelons. No offense to the ladies, but back then the average was more like size 26 A, little fruits, like our apples and oranges. Now they were big, like the genetically modified tomatoes or watermelons you see today. Is a different breast time - he laughs loudly. [Interview 5]

This shift eroded the social fabric, pitting progressive communist ideals against resurgent patriarchal views. Families fractured as husbands stayed up late, wives felt demeaned, and youth questioned gender roles. The series' glamour photography style, showing breasts and pubic hair in artistic poses, normalized eroticism in a society starved of such imagery, ultimately weakening the regime's control over personal relationships and traditional mores.

The names of performers like Deborah, Rosaline, and Elisa became household names, synonymous with beauty and allure. Inspired by these glamorous figures, some Albanians named their pets or even children after them, reflecting a cultural shift toward Western ideals of success and femininity. These names carried an aspirational weight, embodying the liberated, modern women seen on screen. Unlike the toil of factory or farm labor and domestic chores, these women were portrayed in opulent capitalist settings — glistening by pools, scantily clad in modern offices, or breathing through their naked skin the air of seaside or woodland scenes.

> I hid a picture of Deborah under my bed—a captivating office worker with a submissive charm. A friend, a skilled photographer, captured her image from the TV using a long-exposure technique, draping a black cloth to block ambient light and freeze her likeness

> from the flickering broadcast. That photograph became our prized contraband, shared secretly among friends. I even named a stray cat Deborah in her honor. [Interview 5]

18 Exposing the Revolutionary Guard: Virility and Political Legitimacy

The aging Albanian revolutionary guard, veterans of Hoxha's partisan struggles, projected an image of stoic virility to maintain authority. Electric Blue's virile male performers—like Blake Palmer and Rick Savage—contrasted sharply with these elderly leaders, whose public personas lacked vitality. Late-night exposures highlighted the guard's perceived impotence, both literal and metaphorical, in the face of youthful, Western sensuality.

> My father, recalls one interviewer, a veteran, always boasting about his days fighting in the mountains. But when Electric Blue started airing, I noticed a change. He would fall asleep in his chair, exhausted, unable to keep up with the late nights. The next morning, he was irritable and distracted, no longer the disciplined leader he once was. The men in his unit began to whisper that the old guard had lost its edge, that they were no match for the temptations of the modern world. It was as if the broadcasts had exposed their vulnerabilities, making them seem frail and out of touch. For the first time, I saw doubt in his eyes and his hands shaking. [Interview 6]

> Another recalls his interaction with his father, an officer in the army.
>
> My father had been an officer during the Chinese military drills in the 1970s, personally decorated by a Chinese general. At the time, we lived together in a two-room apartment with a shared bathroom—that's just how things were back then. Anyway, one day he walked in and caught my wife and me on the couch in the sitting room, where the TV was on and Electric Blue was playing. He was furious, telling me I shouldn't imitate these new, deviant practices that involved "other organs—more noble organs—meant for eating and speaking." He never let me kiss him again. I do miss him.[Interview 10]

As whispers spread about the leaders' inability to "keep up" with modern desires, their political legitimacy crumbled. The series revealed a generational chasm: while the old guard preached asceticism, the broadcasts celebrated bodily freedom. This revelation accelerated disillusionment, portraying the regime as outmoded and incapable of inspiring loyalty.

19 Raising an Electrified Generation: From Horniness to Revolution

Perhaps the most profound impact was on Albania's youth. Electric Blue cultivated a generation of "horny teenagers" whose restlessness transcended politics. In the 1980s, as TVs proliferated, adolescents tuned in for thrills, awakening desires suppressed by communist austerity. This hormonal surge fueled not ideological pluralism but a primal quest for sexual liberation.

> It was hard. Our poor mothers had to sew up our pants pockets almost every day. And it's not like we had many pairs of pants to change into–I had only two. One time my mother went to one of those private tailors we called "Dinamo Gucci." He worked shifts at a factory called Dinamo. A famous tailor–Arjan Çani, I still remember his name. He stitched in some leather or other tough material so well that I couldn't poke a hole through with my finger to grab "it." I had to walk all the way to school holding a book in front of my crotch. At school, everyone was surprised to see me carrying a book–and it had to be a book by Enver Hoxha, of all things. [Interviewer 9]

By 1990-1991, these teenagers—now young adults—took to the streets, toppling the regime.(Rama 2020) Protests, ostensibly for democracy, were underpinned by cravings for the freedoms glimpsed in Electric Blue's erotic world. The fall of communism in Albania wasn't solely about economic reform or human rights; it was a sexual revolution disguised as political upheaval, with the series as its unwitting catalyst.

> I was protesting for the idea of free sex. I didn't yet know I was gay, only that I was drawn to unshaven, unwashed men. To mingle in that raw fraternity, thick with testosterone from the electrifying erotic TV series, was liberating. Yes, it was a "men's regime," but of the old kind—sour-smelling heterosexual men, dry and coarse as fig leaves. And there I was, in the middle of it, protesting. Protesting against my father, my uncle, my teacher—and, above all, against the regime itself, a thing I hated as much as the stale breath of its keepers. [Interview 6]

20 Protest and Rage

The youth became politically active once they understood who the real culprits were behind their isolation and enforced sexual prudence—especially the students.(Krasniqi 1998)

> I remember the day of the big student protest in December 1990. I was at home, glued to the TV, watching Electric Blue and other erotic movies on the Yugoslav channels. I lost track of time and only realized something was happening outside when the electricity suddenly went out. My friend Blendi Fevziu was already in the

> streets, making history. I was so furious at the interruption—just as he was furious at the regime—that I leapt from the second floor of Dormitory 19 straight into the protest, shouting at the top of my lungs: "Down with the electricity!" [Interview 3]

People initially gathered for collective viewings of erotic films, but when the conditions for such gatherings were disrupted, these same networks and energies spilled over into contentious political action.

> Then came Perja, a legendary character who had lived for years in the United States. He was among the first to open a pornographic cinema in Tirana, in 1990.
>
> The first informal cinema was set up in an ordinary apartment. Perja had converted a room in his home into a theater. He brought in cafeteria chairs and screened VHS tapes. And remember, we're talking about Myslym Shyri Street. He worked in partnership with someone else who had brought equipment from Germany. A ticket cost 30 lekë. It was both business and urban culture—30 lekë to watch an erotic film, split into segments, by the minute!(Elian Tanini 2025)

21 Legacy and Conclusion

Electric Blue, born from Britain's burgeoning home-video industry and later aired on platforms like the Playboy Channel, transcended its origins as light entertainment. Carried into Albanian living rooms via Yugoslav broadcasts, it pierced the country's iron curtain–leveraging technology, timing, and temptation to breach a fortress of isolation. From evading jammers with improvised antennas to inspiring anti-regime ingenuity, from subtly eroding worker morale to challenging social norms, exposing the hypocrisies of leadership, and sparking youthful defiance, the series demonstrated that softcore imagery could exert a decidedly hardcore influence.

In the annals of Cold War cultural subversion, *Electric Blue* stands as a vivid case study of how media, even in its most unlikely forms, can destabilize authoritarian control. This article offers a rare blend of cultural texture, historical specificity, and methodological originality in tracing its impact. Its significance lies not only in documenting an overlooked episode of Albanian media history, but also in reframing the study of "soft" cultural imports as potent agents within the machinery of hard authoritarianism.

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The Arab-Islamic Conspiracy: Critical Asessment

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Abstract: This article deals with the *Arab–Islamic conspiracy*. It views it as both *geo-political* and *ideological/intellectual–cultural*. The article shows how these narratives are pushed by global anti-Islam political rhetoric and sociological constructs inherited from modernist and orientalist thought.

Keywords: islam; arabic-islamic conspiracy, albanian islam, european islam

22 The Arab-Islamic Conspiracy in Albania: A Geopolitical and Sociological Analysis

Applying the sanctioned analytical framework proposed by Grand Master Robert Weiler, the so-called *Arab–Islamic conspiracy* as a narrative may be classified simultaneously under the *geo-political* and the *ideological/intellectual–cultural* categories. While religion or cultural belonging can certainly operate as intrinsic motivational factors at the individual level, this analysis deliberately brackets those dimensions, treating religion and ideology instead as structural and social forces that are mobilized, instrumentalized, and often weaponized in the service of broader strategic designs.

Within Albania, proponents of the *Arab–Islamic conspiracy* narrative draw on global anti-Islam political rhetoric as well as sociological constructs inherited from modernist and orientalist thought. This discourse frames political Islam as a direct threat to Albania's social trajectory and its Western geopolitical alignment, frequently collapsing the distinctions between Arab and Iranian spheres of influence, and in doing so, obscuring their very real and often competing hegemonic ambitions.

The genealogy of this narrative reaches back to the post-Ottoman modernization drive of the 1920s, when Albanian intellectuals and the monarchy—taking cues from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secular reforms—pursued radical secularization as both a social and political project. In this era, the state actively countered what it identified as *Islamic–Turkish conspiracies* associated with feudal resistance to modernization, personified in figures such as Haxhi Qamili.(Sulstarova 2006)

Under the communist regime established in the 1940s, this anti-religious stance was reconfigured to serve state atheism, portraying Islam as inherently regressive and antithetical to socialist modernity. Yet, in a pragmatic twist, the regime differentiated between the religious and political expressions of Islam, seeing in pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism potential anti-colonial allies against Western imperialism. This ambivalence allowed Enver Hoxha to extend rhetorical solidarity to the Palestinian cause,(Kellici 2021) to Arab nationalist movements, and eventually to the Iranian Revolution.(Hoxha 1978) In parallel, Albania trained Third World militants and hosted Palestinian and other Arab students.(Shahini 2024) By contrast, the Catholic Church was cast as a direct political instrument of Western, especially Italian, imperial designs.

The collapse of communism in 1991 marked a rupture in these discourses.

Freed from the ideological straitjacket of state atheism, the public sphere opened to a range of religious actors, including missionaries linked to Saudi-funded Wahhabi networks. These currents, particularly active among youth, stoked fears of ideological realignment and potential mobilization for regional conflicts—fears amplified by the wars in Bosnia (1992–1995) and Kosovo (1998–1999), where religious and civilizational framings were never far from political rhetoric.

In the post-1990s environment, certain Albanian intellectuals and political figures began reframing Islam as a civilizational threat, importing conceptual elements from American neoconservatism, Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* thesis,(Huntington 1996) Bernard Lewis's cultural diagnoses,(Lewis and Churchill 2008) and the *Eurabia* thesis. In this rearticulated narrative, Islamic revivalism and youth radicalization are positioned as components of a transnational strategy aimed at eroding Albania's secular institutions and reorienting it toward an Islamic political order.

Prominent proponents—such as Ben Blushi, Mero Baze, and Mustafa Nano—have advanced these arguments in both print and broadcast media, casting themselves as defenders of secularism. Yet critics within the Islamic community and beyond have documented the islamophobic tropes embedded in this discourse, noting its tendency toward xenophobia, racism, and reductive caricatures of Islamic belief and practice.(Jazexhi 2011) They argue that by flattening the complexities of Islamic theology and the sociopolitical diversity of Muslim communities, the *Arab–Islamic conspiracy* narrative risks functioning less as a sober analysis and more as an ideological weapon in Albania's ongoing struggle over identity, sovereignty, and geopolitical alignment.

23 Examples of the Arab-Islamic Conspiracy Narrative

Accusations of an *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* have targeted figures like Enver Hoxha, for his pro-Arab stance in the Israeli-Arab conflict and anti-colonialism, and Sali Berisha, for alleged ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi groups. Berisha's government, in particular, faced accusations of enabling the spread of radical Islam through foreign-funded religious schools and mosques.

Mero Baze, a prominent journalist with ties to the Socialist Party, has been a vocal critic of Arab and Islamic influence in Albania. He has accused Berisha, a former collaborator, of permitting the infiltration of Wahhabi and Muslim Brotherhood elements, which he claims threaten Albania's secular fabric. Baze's writings frequently invoke the specter of an *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* aimed at undermining Albania's Western orientation (Jazexhi 2011).

However, Berisha's associations with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the Muslim Brotherhood were largely transactional, driven by the need for financial aid in the early 1990s, when Albania faced severe economic hardship. Organizations like *Al Haramain* (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2008) provided aid to Berisha's constituents, leading to accusations that his government overlooked the spread of radical Islam in exchange for political and financial support.

While allegation against Berisha of permitting radical Islam's spread surfaced in international media as well, particularly from British intelligence assets (Vickers and Pettifer 1997), it was Serbian nationalists who, to undermine the

Kosovo freedom movement, propagated this conspiracy. They aimed to promote anti-American and anti-Albanian narratives by fabricating or associating the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and its political wing, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), led by Berisha's ally Hashim Thaçi, with Islamic extremism (Šofranac 2025).

Similarly, Ben Blushi(Muslim Forum of Albania 2008) and Mustafa Nano have criticized the influence of Arab and Islamic groups in Albania, framing them as threats to the country's secularism and Western alignment. For example, *The Muslim Forum of Albania*, together with other Muslim associations, strongly condemned Ben Blushi's 2008 novel Living on an Island, accusing it of fostering Islamophobia, religious intolerance, and historical revisionism. The book is said to distort Islamic teachings, demean sacred symbols—including the Prophet Muhammad—and depict Albanian Muslims as backward, disloyal, and uncivilized. It misrepresents the Quran, propagates racist stereotypes against Muslims, Turks, and Roma, and undermines Albania's national identity and historical legacy. Furthermore, Blushi's status as a politician amplifies the novel's divisive potential, warning that such narratives may serve Albania's historical adversaries by undermining national cohesion and disrupting religious harmony.

Beside mainstream intellectuals, also radical conspiracy theorist like Kastriot Myftaraj have contributed to the Arab-Islamic conspiracy narrative, framing Islam as a threat to Albania's national identity and secularism. Myftaraj who died from suicide, portrayed Islam as an alien political influence and accused the Albanian government of colluding with foreign Islamic entities to undermine the country's sovereignty and promote radicalization.

While Albanian civil society and the government have collaborated with Western intelligence agencies and civil society organizations to monitor and counter radicalization, Western intelligence agencies have displayed inconsistent approaches. Initially permissive during the Bosnian War, following the 1998 Nairobi attacks attributed to Al-Qaeda, the U.S. and European countries intensified scrutiny of Arab and Islamic groups in Albania, leading to the closure of several organizations and arrests of suspected terrorists. A similar pattern emerged with Albanian radicals involved in the Syrian conflict and the Islamic State between 2008 and 2013. Initially tolerated, these activities were curtailed by Albanian intelligence agencies with a heavy hand once Western support for anti-regime groups in Syria diminished.

Albanian nationalists, such as Abdi Baleta (Baleta 2025), have criticized these conspiracy theories, denouncing what they perceive as shallow Islamophobia that equates all Islamic expression with fundamentalism. Echoing the views of Bosnian intellectual Alija Izetbegović (Izetbegović 1984), they argue Islam has protected Albania from assimilation by its Orthodox Christian chauvinist neighbors. For these nationalists, Islam is an integral part of Albanian identity, not a threat to it (Sulstarova 2003).

24 The Iranian Connection

Iran's engagement with Albania has shifted dramatically since the 1980s, driven by ideological differences, regional conflicts, soft power efforts, the relocation

of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), and escalating cyber warfare, culminating in severed diplomatic ties.

In the 1980s, Albania's communist regime under Enver Hoxha expressed symbolic support for Iran's Islamic Revolution, driven by anti-Western sentiment and its previous alignment with Iranian maoist communist movement rather than religious alignment. Iran's internal anti-communist purges during the Iraq-Iran war and focus on the Iran-Iraq War prevented diplomatic ties, as Albania maintained ties with Iranian communist groups.(Kardryni 2025)

During the Bosnian War, Iran supported Bosnian Muslims with arms and advisors as it was trying to subvert Saudi Arabia's project of Islamic hegemony. Using it as a transit point, this logistical role marked a strategic re-engagement as it leveraged Albania's geographic position to extend Iran's influence in the Balkans.

Iran opened an embassy in Tirana and launched cultural initiatives like the *Saadi Shirazi*and *Shoqata Flladi* foundations to promote Shiite Islam, Iranian culture, and influence the Bektashi order. These efforts had limited success due to Albania's strong political patronage and U.S. influence.

A pivotal turning point that led to the cessation of Iran's soft power initiatives was the arrival of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) in Albania, an Iranian opposition group that had fought against Iran in the Iraq–Iraq war.

The relocation was facilitated by the United States, with the intervention of American politicians in exchange for lobbying on behalf of the Albanian government. One such politician was the US Congressman John McCain, a veteran of the U.S.–Vietnam War with a controversial past. As Ron Unz suggests, "McCain's stories of his torture as a POW were probably fictional, invented to serve as a cover and an excuse for the very real record of his wartime collaboration with his Communist captors."[1]

Of course, for Albania, hosting foreign radical militias was neither new nor particularly challenging for the government. During the period of Albanian–Chinese relations, the country had welcomed hundreds of radicals from Palestine, Iran, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Congo, and other freedom fighters of the Maoist anti-colonial movement—all funded by Chinese support.

In 2013 MEK escalated tensions as the group continued its subversive activities against Iran in Albania. Investigations have exposed MEK "troll farms" operating from Ashraf III, where "online soldiers" are reportedly trained to disseminate hashtags advocating for the overthrow of the Iranian regime.(Associated Press 2021) Camps established near Durres hosted around 1,900 MEK members by 2016 – *Ashraf III*. This move, supported by U.S. aid, drew Albania into the Iran-MEK conflict, prompting Iran to close cultural organizations and expel diplomats in 2018.

Iranian state-backed cyberattacks, attributed to groups like Homeland Justice, targeted Albanian infrastructure, notably e-Albania in 2022, leading to severed diplomatic ties. Further attacks in 2023 and a police raid on Ashraf III underscored Albania's role as a proxy battleground in U.S.-Iran tensions. In 2025, a day before Israel's military action against Iranian nuclear facilities, a leader of MEK terrorists confessed they had been spying for Israel.

[1] Ron Unz (March 9, 2015). *John McCain: When 'Tokyo Rose' Ran for President.* The Unz Review.

Iran-Albania relations have evolved from ideological divergence to open hostility, driven by the MEK's presence and cyber warfare. Albania's Western alignment and hosting of the MEK have made it a target for Iranian retaliation, highlighting the risks for smaller nations in global rivalries.

25 The Great Replacement in Albanian Discourse: Fiction, Fear, and Foreigners

In recent years, elements of the far-right "Great Replacement" theory—originally popularized by French writer Renaud Camus—have found new life in Albanian political commentary and fiction. This theory, which posits that native European populations are being systematically "replaced" by immigrants from the Middle East and Africa through migration and demographic change, has been weaponized by certain Albanian authors and conspiracy theorists to articulate fears of cultural erosion, national decline, and foreign domination.

Two prominent examples are the fictional narrative of Ben Blushi's novel Komploti (The Conspiracy) and a political article critiquing Albania's decision to shelter Afghan collaborators at the request of the United States. Both texts clearly reflect and perpetuate the central anxiety of the Great Replacement theory, adapted to Albania's specific historical and geopolitical context. While Blushi uses speculative fiction and symbolic characters to dramatize the fear of demographic erasure, Kastriot Myftaraj does so through nationalistic, conspiratorial journalism. Together, they reinforce a shared narrative: that Albania is under threat from foreign populations replacing its native ethnic and cultural identity, whether by accident, conspiracy, or foreign manipulation.

In The Conspiracy, Blushi constructs a dystopian future in which Albania becomes a battleground for demographic and cultural replacement. The central character, Muhamed Durrani—an Afghan refugee—marries a local Catholic woman and becomes Albania's Minister of Defense. His supposed long-term goal is to resettle large numbers of Afghans on Albanian soil, ultimately founding a new Afghanistan on the ruins of a depopulated Albania. The implication is clear: as Albanians emigrate, foreign populations with alien traditions are moving in, slowly and deliberately transforming the national identity. Blushi couches his narrative in the future (post-2040), but his descriptions are meant to reflect and critique current trends, such as immigration, political corruption, and what he portrays as cultural decay.

The novel also introduces classic anti-Semitic tropes—three invisible Jewish characters allegedly orchestrating world events—adding another layer of conspiracy. The blending of Jews as shadowy manipulators with Muslims as demographic invaders mirrors a longstanding narrative found in European nationalist and far-right circles. By presenting such scenarios as fiction that eerily resembles reality, Blushi gives plausible deniability to the ideology, allowing readers to view the narrative as either allegorical or prophetic.

This literary construction finds an ideological twin in the political commentary surrounding Albania's role in hosting Afghan collaborators. In a 2021 article, outrage is directed at the Albanian government's agreement to shelter thousands of Afghans who assisted NATO forces. The author frames the move not as humanitarian or strategic, but as another sign of foreign imposition and

national subjugation. By comparing Albania to a "sheepfold" and warning of demographic threats from "Turks and Arabs," the article employs the same racialized fearmongering central to the Great Replacement theory. The concern is not simply over policy or logistics, but over the imagined future in which Albania is no longer Albanian—transformed by outsiders and abandoned by its own people.

The article goes further, suggesting a conspiracy in which US bureaucrats and local intermediaries collude to flood Albania with Muslims. The language escalates to near-apocalyptic warnings, with references to "cleaning our house from bad insects," echoing dehumanizing rhetoric often used in nationalist propaganda. The sarcastic suggestion that Guam might become "Guamistan" parallels the novel's depiction of Shën Gjini turning into an Afghan stronghold—fiction and journalism converging in their shared suspicion of the foreign "Other."

These narratives are not isolated; they resonate with a broader European trend of framing migration as a civilizational threat. In the Albanian case, however, they are supercharged by historical trauma, a fragile national identity, and post-communist instability. The result is a potent mixture of ethnonationalism and conspiracy, repackaged for domestic consumption through both fiction and political commentary.

While authors like Blushi may claim to be merely holding up a mirror to society, the mirror they craft reflects a worldview shaped by fear, myth, and suspicion. By invoking the specter of the Great Replacement, they do more than critique policy—they fuel a narrative of existential danger that blurs the line between cultural preservation and xenophobic paranoia.

26 Conclusion

The *Arab-Islamic conspiracy* narrative in Albania reflects a complex interplay of historical, sociological, and geopolitical factors. It has evolved from post-Ottoman secularization efforts to the anti-religious policies of the communist era, and finally to the post-1991 period shaped by global influences. Proponents of this narrative often depict Islam as a threat to Albania's secular and Western identity, drawing on orientalist tropes and neoconservative discourse.

However, such arguments risk oversimplifying the lived realities of Muslim communities and may contribute to societal division through inflammatory rhetoric. Accusations against political figures like Enver Hoxha and Sali Berisha typically reflect pragmatic—rather than ideological—relationships with Arab or Islamic states, driven primarily by economic and political considerations. In contrast, many Albanian nationalists regard Islam as an integral part of national identity and reject narratives that conflate religious affiliation with extremism. The tension between these opposing views highlights the ongoing struggle to define Albania's cultural and religious identity within a globalized world. A more nuanced understanding of this religious landscape is essential to promoting social cohesion and resisting divisive conspiracy narratives.

Moreover, the Arab-Islamic conspiracy intersects with other geopolitical narratives, particularly the Yugoslav and American conspiracies. First, this divisive rhetoric has been amplified by actors linked to Yugoslavia who seek

to delegitimize the Kosovar independence movement by associating it with Islamic extremism. Second, it draws heavily from anti-Islamic discourses rooted in the neoconservative agenda of the United States. And third, at the operational level—-regardless of their veracity—-these conspiratorial framings are reinforced by the ambiguous involvement of U.S. intelligence services in Middle Eastern conflicts.

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