"We Raise Our Eyes and Feel as if She Rules the Sky": The Mother Albania Monument and the Visualization of National History

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1. Introduction
On the morning of May 5, 1972, Enver Hoxha and the party leadership, together with hundreds of citizens of the People’s Socialist Republic of Albania, gathered on a hill overlooking Tirana from the southeast, in the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation. 'This Martyrs’ Day celebration was the first to be held in the new martyrs’ cemetery, a complex that – in a more modest manifestation – had previously occupied the hill of St. Procopius in Tirana’s Great Park [ALS–8]. Those assembled stood on an open platform before the centerpiece of the new cemetery complex, the imposing figure of the Mother Albania monument [ALS–12], which rose 22 meters over the crowds below (fig. 1). Reporting on the commemoration for the newspaper Zëri i Popullit, Agim Shehu described, in particular, those mothers who had come to honor the dead who had given their lives in the struggle against fascist occupation and in support of the Popular Revolution:

They hold clusters of flowers to their chests as if they held their own sons. They bring these flowers to leave for their sons, together with the feeling of a mother’s gratitude and warmth with which they grasp them to their breast. However, they are something greater than simply the mothers of their children. We see their true face before us, above

Fig. 1. P. Cici, Në mitingun përkujtimor (At the Memorial Gathering), from Zëri i Popullit, May 6, 1972.


2 The statue itself is twelve meters high, mounted atop a ten meter pedestal.
us, in the great monument *Mother Albania* of the martyrs of the Fatherland. Albania itself lives in the symbol of the mother. [...] We raise our eyes and feel as if she rules the sky. In her majesty is the majesty of the struggle of the people, the majesty of the ideals of the party, for which so many sons of the people gloriously fell.  

The monument and the cemetery itself ensured that this struggle would not be lost to memory, that it would live on and strengthen the perpetual construction of socialist Albania. In his speech on the occasion, Manush Myftiu, First Secretary of the Party Committee for Tirana, not only described the heroism of those who had given their lives for the fatherland, but also emphasized the crucial role of memorials erected to the fallen. “This martyrs’ cemetery, and the thousands upon thousands of lapidars that fill Albania, are a great source of inspiration, especially for our younger generation, so that out of the heroic past [this generation] may draw lessons for the future [...]”.

If *Mother Albania*’s elemental purview was the vast reaches of the sky, the earth of the cemetery itself democratized the fallen and enshrined the origin of the synthesis that culminated in the symbol of the mother-as-nation. Myftiu stated, “Here before us lies the simple partisan alongside the most distinguished leaders of the people’s party, the commander and the commissar, the worker, the villager, the student, [...] the communist alongside he who did not have a party membership card.” Thus, both visually and conceptually, the great arc of the cemetery itself and the lone figure of *Mother Albania* represented the perennial dialectic between horizontal stability and harmony – the “monolithic unity of the masses” – and vertical dynamism that often appeared in socialist realist sculpture (fig. 2). The monument itself, however, embodied a second synthesis, that between the horizontal – and inevitable – forward motion of national history and the ascent towards both collective coalescence and transcendence, toward the realization of an overarching national identity arising from the memory of the dead.

The purpose of this essay is to consider the Mother Albania monument as the materialization of a number of ideas about time, history, and society that characterized the late 1960s and early 1970s in communist Albania, as the locus of a constellation of transformations and syntheses. My goal is in fact quite modest: to offer a typology of these syntheses, to examine the meaning of the work in relation to Albanian communist cultural development from several viewpoints, with particular attention to the significance of its representation of the female form. I will focus primarily on the work’s conception and execution during the communist period, and indeed specifically on the years immediately preceding its inauguration, only briefly considering the post-socialist period in the concluding section.

While certain aspects of the monument’s meaning will receive more attention than others, my aim is to respect the multivalent character of the work’s significance in its own time, to capture the simultaneously monolithic and disparate characteristics that are to be found in the formal qualities of the work itself. However, when encountering works of socialist realism – of which *Mother Albania* represents a particularly unique and at times confounding example – it is necessary to temper the formal considerations common to the practice of art history with a respect for the invisible, conceptual, discursive aspect that plays a fundamental role in the meaning of such works.

As much as *Mother Albania* is the concrete, formal, materialization of (Albanian) History, the work nonetheless also presents the figure of the mother as a form in flux between intangibility and tangibility, a point of

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3 Agim Shehu, “... Tek Ata që Ranë për Atdhë,” *Zëri i Popullit*, May 6, 1972. Shehu noted that mothers held a particularly distinguished place in commemorative events such as Martyrs’ Day: “one cannot think of such days without thinking of mothers.” [All translations from Albanian to English, unless noted otherwise, are my own.]


5 Ibid.

6 I set aside the post-socialist period largely for reasons of space and scope. However, a subsequent consideration of the work’s subsequent reception would, as I hope to suggest through an elaboration of its genesis, prove productive for an understanding of both the status of communist cultural heritage in Albania (one of the aims of this publication) and of evolving conceptions of modern Albanian identity.

7 This in turn means considering both the creative genesis of the work and its treatment in the discourse of its time. Such discourse is often far removed from contemporary expectations of “critical” discourse, and might be better termed “poetic.” This often leads to the dismissal of such writings as no more than laudatory propaganda meant to celebrate the triumphs of the communist regime. Agim Shehu’s quite lyrical description of the mothers gathered below *Mother Albania* is one such example of this type of discourse, which privileges poetic exegesis over critical consideration or “reporting.” However, one of the defining characteristics of the communist state in Albania (and elsewhere) might be said to be its embrace of precisely this kind of totalizing poetics. Insofar as the totalitarian aspect of communism – or Stalinist – states has an inextricably aesthetic character (as Boris Groys has most famously argued), then the poetic, panegyrical, discussion of such works must be considered a significant aspect of their meaning, alongside their formal qualities. For the aesthetic character of Stalinist states, see Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, trans. Charles Rougle (New York: Verso, 2011).
transition – to put it in Hegel’s language, it represents “the woman […] as the middle term [through whom] the unconscious Spirit rises out of its unreality into actual existence, out of a state in which it is unknowing and unconscious into the realm of conscious Spirit.” Understanding Mother Albania helps us understand how this collective, national Spirit was constructed in communist Albania: what it looked like, what it meant, and how it shaped the narrative of past, present, and future in the country.

2. The birth of Mother Albania

The decision to move Tirana’s martyrs’ cemetery from the city’s Great Park to its new location was first made by the Council of Ministers in April of 1964. As the project developed, its scope widened: the new cemetery was to include not only the graves of partisans and other martyrs of the fight for national liberation, but also the graves of notable party members and martyrs from Kosovo. (This more democratic interpretation of the cemetery’s meaning is hinted at in Myftiu’s description of those commemorated together in its grounds.)

In 1966, a competition to design the new cemetery was announced, and three groups of architects and sculptors were formed: one at the State Project Institute, one at the Architecture Department of the University of Tirana (this group included the well-known trio of sculptors Kristaq Rama, Shaban Hadëri, and Muntaz Dhrami), and one at the Urbanism and Design Office of the Executive Committee of the City of Tirana. The proposed projects from each group were displayed in the Palace of Culture, and seen by both the public and by party leadership, including Enver Hoxha. The initial project from the group at the Urbanism and Design Office centered around the figure of a massive eagle, which extended one wing horizontally, protecting the graves, with the other wing held high in victory.

The group at the University presented a number of different projects, most of which contained a central obelisk or stylized flag form with a sculpture of either a partisan or an embodiment

9 Enver Faja, “Jetëgjatësia e simboleve në arkekturë,” in Kush e drejton urbanistikën shopjatë (Tiranë: ufo University Press, 2008), p. 37. As Faja notes, this resulted in a general change in the name of the cemetery to the “Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation” (rather than simply “of Tirana” or “of the National Liberation War”). At one point, the project also included, according to Faja, plans for a mausoleum that would one day house Enver Hoxha’s body, but this idea was subsequently abandoned (presumably since it acknowledged the inevitable death of the leader). See Faja, “Jetëgjatësia e Simboleve në Arkekturë,” p. 39. Hoxha was buried in the cemetery when he died in 1985. This essay does not specifically address the reasons for relocating the cemetery, nor the specifics governing the expanded interpretation of the “martyrs” to be buried there. It is certainly true that the relocation heightened the majestic quality of the cemetery, increasing its elevation and visibility, and giving it an even more sweeping view of Tirana than its former location had offered. (The replacement of the simple obelisk that had graced the former cemetery with a massive figural sculpture also contributed to this increased visual presence.) Further study of the policies on martyrs’ cemeteries in the period under consideration would shed greater light on aspects of Tirana’s martyrs’ cemetery beyond the Mother Albania statue.
10 Petraq Kolevica, Arkektura dhe diktatura (Tiranë: Logoreci, 2004), p. 143. The group at the University was composed of professor B. Daja; engineer I. Papanikolla; architects Enver Faja, V. Cicko, and R. Kote; and the three sculptors. The group at the Urbanism and Design Office was composed of architect Petraq Kolevica and sculptors Perikli Çuli and Hektor Dule.
11 Ibid., 142–47. Kolevica notes that this design was ultimately abandoned both for aesthetic reasons and because of the technical difficulties presented by the extended horizontal wing. The second version of the project featured an eagle with both wings vertical, and a smaller figural grouping with a partisan standing before it.
of *Mother Albania* in front of it.

According to sculptor Muntaz Dhrami, the preferred design for the monument (among those working at the University) was a version with two stylized flag forms sweeping upward, framing the central figure at the base. It was Shaban Hadëri who was most enthusiastic about the *Mother Albania* figure; the other members of the group felt that such a figure might recall the American Statue of Liberty too closely, and that the party officials would prefer the version with the partisan. This version was indeed that preferred, Dhrami recalls, by Mehmet Shehu. However, when Enver Hoxha examined the various maquettes for the projects, he considered the stylized flags too Modernist, and instead exhibited a strong preference for a lone *Mother Albania* figure. Shehu, falling in line with Hoxha's preference, then exhorted the sculptors to "make her a strong Albanian woman, not a ballerina." The decision to eliminate the surrounding sculptural elements and to focus solely on the single figure made the final design for the Tirana Martyrs' Cemetery unique among such cemeteries. Generally, when martyrs' cemeteries included figural compositions in the round, they were accompanied by geometric, architectonic elements (such as a pillar towering behind the figure) in keeping with the visual vocabulary of lapidars. In the case of *Mother Albania*, the human figure both stands alone and takes the place of the geometric ensemble, essentially become a lapidar itself (a point to which I will return below).

Work on the cemetery and the *Mother Albania* monument proceeded during a period of intense cultural activity. From 1966 until 1969, Albania's government was focused on the implementation wide-ranging cultural and political changes (modeled partially on Mao's Cultural Revolution). As Hoxha put it in 1966, "The further revolutionization of the life of the country cannot be understood without the development and deepening of the ideological and cultural revolution." This ideologic and cultural development included the construction of an impressive number of new monuments, slated for completion in 1969, for the 25-year anniversary of liberation from fascist occupiers. Among the artworks being created at the time were the Monument to the Four Heroes of Miridita, the Monument to the Five Heroes of Vig [ALS–575], and the Memorial to the Battle of Mushqeta [ALS–504]. At the same time, the trio of sculptors tasked with *Mother Albania* were also at work on the massive Vlora Independence Monument [ALS–460]. This monument was also originally intended to be completed by 1969, but – perhaps unsurprisingly – was not finished till 1972, the same year that *Mother Albania* was inaugurated. During the "further revolutionization" of the country that occurred in the late 1960s and into the early 1970s, a number of ideas were surfacing and circulating that shaped both popular and official expectations regarding the meanings of monumental and commemorative sculpture and its role in the New Life of socialist Albania. It is to these ideas and discourses – evident in both archival documents and published materials – that I now turn, in an attempt to understand *Mother Albania* in relation to the overall cultural and social program of Hoxha's regime.

12 Muntaz Dhrami, discussion with the author, June 16, 2014.
13 Ibid. Presumably Shehu's association of the initial versions of *Mother Albania* with a "ballerina" stems from the pose of the figure, who stood with her feet together, the wind blowing her dress up around her calves, with arms spread out in a V. For images of some of the initial versions of the *Mother Albania* statue, together with the flag forms, see Faja, *Jetëgjatësia e Simboleve në Arkitekturë*, pp. 38–9. The design with the partisan standing before the sweeping flags was subsequently used for the martyrs' cemetery in Kukës [ALS–561]. Sculptor Halim Beqiraj created the figure of the partisan and entered the work in the competition dedicated to the 25th anniversary of Liberation. See "Si në jë shqiponjë," *Drita*, September 21, 1969.
14 Enver Faja also recalls that other members of the University group were dissatisfied with the decision, which they presumably considered conservative and uninspired ("Jetëgjatësia e Simboleve në Arkitekturë," p. 39). However, at least in published materials, there seems to have been no open criticism of the final design of the monument or the cemetery complex – no doubt in part due to Hoxha's intervention in the decision regarding the design. As the recollections of Dhrami, Faja, and Kolevica (ibid., 144.) indicate, the decision over the final design for the cemetery complex reiterated the debate – constant during the years of Hoxha's dictatorship – over the influence of Modernism in Albanian art and literature. However, if the decision to opt for the lone *Mother Albania* figure was a turn against Modernism, it is also undeniable that certain Modernist elements were reintroduced into the final treatment of the figure by Rama, Hadëri, and Dhrami.
16 Enver Hoxha, *Mbi Letësinë dhe Artin*, p. 241. I should note that I have found no specific documentation that the choice of the *Mother Albania* allegorical figure was specifically chosen to conform to policies or ideologies outlined as part of Hoxha's Cultural Revolution. My subsequent observations are simply intended to orient our understanding of the monument in the midst of certain new currents in cultural emphasis, not to argue that the monument's content was entirely determined by these currents. A document from September 19, 1968, signed by Enver Hoxha, indicates nine major projects, including the monuments listed above as well as the completion of the stone foundations for the placement of the *Mother Albania* monument in the Tirana Martyrs' Cemetery (though the completion of the monument itself is not mentioned). See "Vendim: Mbi Vendojesë e Disa Monumenteve, Busteve, dhe Përmendoreve me Rastin e 25-Vjetorit të Çririmit të Adheutë," AQSH, f. 511 v. 1968 d. 49, p. 1.
3. Monumental commemorative sculpture and society in 1960s and 1970s Albania

Why Mother Albania? While the trope of associating the female form – and the mother, specifically – with the collective entity of the nation and its ideals already had many precedents in monumental sculpture, what was its significance at this point in Albanian history?

It is perhaps easier to begin by answering a related question: why not a partisan as the central figure, as the representative of the nation’s fallen? In many ways, Enver Hoxha’s preference for Mother Albania over the figure of the partisan prefigures a series of ideas put forward by painter Kujtim Buza (together with historian Kleanth Dedi) in the early 1970s, ideas which address both aesthetic concerns regarding the construction and placement of monuments and memorials and the ideological implications of the relationship between the nation’s past, present, and future. In 1970, Buza and Dedi issued a report on the problems and criteria for the development of commemorative public sculpture. Buza subsequently published an article in Drita that outlined several of his central concerns specifically regarding the plethora of new martyrs’ cemeteries constructed for the anniversary of Liberation and the sculptures placed in them. He explained that these sculptures should simultaneously honor the fallen and express the optimism that characterized those who fought in the National Liberation War, that they should express that the dream for which they fought and died is now a reality: that socialist Albania […] marches forward from victory to victory.

However, visualizing this dream meant creating sculptural works that did not simply dwell on the figure of the partisan; Buza saw the proliferation of partisan figures in martyrs’ cemeteries as a barrier to the true expression of the representation of women in monuments.

The problem of the partisan as representative of the collective struggle of the nation was not simply a problem of symbols – it was a problem of time. The partisan was problematic not simply because it (most often, he) was repeated far too often for Buza’s taste, but because it did not express the continuity that the “further revolutionization” of the country required. The sculptural centerpieces of martyrs’ cemeteries needed to express not simply the past, but the momentum of the present into the future, the building of socialism.

This same sentiment had been expressed by Enver Hoxha himself in 1969, in the context of a letter to Rama, Hadëri, and Dhramì regarding their work on the Vlora Independence Monument. In the letter, which was published on the front page of Drita, Hoxha urged that the Independence Monument should commemorate not simply a past event, but also the forward charge to arrive at other, even more important goals. In it we would see our own revolution moving forward, rising up. The imagination of the people should see […] that which it realized in the glorious National Liberation War, that which it is realizing today in the building of socialism.

It is not, I think, unlikely that these ideas were also incorporated by the trio of sculptors into the Mother Albania monument.

These debates about the figure of the partisan and the attempt to find a symbol that would glorify Albania’s present as much as its past coincided with concern over the representation of women in monuments. Central Committee Secretary Ramiz Alia, in a 1968 report on the development of monumental propaganda, expressed “the representation of the thematics that pertains to the treatment of the Albanian woman is very unsatisfactory,” chiefly because of the absence of such themes in extant public art. He insisted that it was urgent that

Thus it seems as if only the [figure of the] partisan can honor all the fallen partisans and martyrs. This reduces the historical period of […] pledging oaths in the name of new victories, as if this time belonged only to the partisans in the years of the war, and not to all of the [Albanian] people today, in their battles to construct socialist society.


22 There remains a vast amount of research to be done on the representation of women in Albanian communist art, both in painting and in sculpture. The present study of Mother Albania represents only an initial step towards a full understanding of how the visual arts constructed the roles and understandings of women during Hoxha’s regime.
the Albanian woman was symbolized “as a warrior that has played an important role in all periods of our people's history.” This assessment of the representation of women in monumental works certainly parallels the concerns of Hoxha’s cultural policies, which placed a great emphasis on the emancipation of women and the development of their role in socialist society. However, these ideas can only partially explain why Mother Albania might have represented a particularly satisfactory allegory for a monument first commissioned at the outset of Hoxha’s Cultural Revolution.

First of all, Mother Albania is not a representation of one of the heroines of the people, nor is she the anonymous figure of the female partisan. If anything, part of the work’s uniqueness is precisely that it avoids the obvious solution of celebrating the present by depicting the New Woman of socialism, instead retaining an almost classical allegorical figure. There was, at the time, no extant monumental precedent within Albania for the representation of the nation as a woman, but there was such a precedent in the initial 1962 design for the Vlora Independence Monument, which had initially been conceptualized as a figure of “Albania, strong, wise, brave, a kind mother, an undefeated warrior, with a sword at her waist,” dressed in national costume. This figure would have held aloft a flag in one hand, while the other extended a golden wreath to crown a group of Albanian fighters. Compared to this overtly classical conception of Albania-as-mother, the Mother Albania monument does indeed represent a significant attempt to make the theme more “of its time.”

Part of the key to understanding the way in which Mother Albania – an allegory with little direct reference to the New Life or the New Woman – could still be a paradigm of the (self-described) innovative tendencies of Albanian socialist realism involves understanding the privileged role of symbol in this type of art. While socialist realism’s stated goal was the reflection of social reality to the highest level of artistic realism. These are works that “pass into metaphor, that make figurative associations, that are symbols.” Thus, a statement like that by Agim Shehu, quoted at the outset of this essay (“Albania itself lives in the symbol of the mother”24) takes on an additional import: the treatment of Mother Albania as a symbol – the mother-as-nation – in fact only increased the work’s ability to represent diverse, more “concrete” aspects of socialist life (the emancipation of women, shared national sacrifice, and so forth). This may seem like a straightforward description of the function of symbols, but its significance lies in the recognition that this system described how art and reality coincided, not how art abstracted itself from socialist reality.

If we return to Mother Albania as a quintessentially symbolic work, and thus see it as one of the highest manifestations of socialist realism, then we might note one additional significant association that the monument suggests: that between the nation and the family. If Mother Albania’s function is to aesthetically crystallize – in a way I will address below – a shared national past that at the same time lives on in the shared national struggle to build socialism, then it does so by suggesting a familial bond between the fallen, the living, and future generations. As Luljeta Ikonomi and Shannon Woodcock have pointed out, a significant piece of Hoxha’s cultural policy aimed at the regulation of the family unit and ensuring that the function of this unit supported socialist practices of production and power distribution. Thus, the depiction of the nation as mother is not only (and perhaps, not primarily) explained by the increased focus on women’s issues during the period of Hoxha’s Cultural Revolution, but also by the focus on the family. Imagining the nation as a family strengthened not only the perception of a single ethno-cultural heritage, but also symbolically translated communist policies of family control into the regime of official aesthetic representation and commemoration.

Up to this point, I have attempted to show the Mother Albania monument caught up amidst several transitions and currents: between different understandings of socialist realist aesthetics, in the midst of changing social expectations regarding the role of women, and at

24 The allegorical image of the female-partisan-as-mother was later visualized in the Martyrs’ Cemetery in Lushnja (1965–1966).
25 “Mbi Përmendoren e Pesëdhjetëvjetorit në Vlorë,” AQSH E. 490, v. 1962, d. 992, p. 4. There was, of course, a rich literary tradition of associating the Albanian nation with a woman, with Pashko Vasa’s O Moj Shqypni being perhaps the best known example.
26 I place the word ‘reality’ in quotes to indicate, as the quote below demonstrates, that for socialist realism, there was no contradiction between reality and a metaphorical understanding of the world. In fact, the two were equivalent.
28 Ibid.
the crux of a new vision of the temporal relationship between past and present. There are almost certainly other such currents that remain to be examined in greater depth. However, I now wish to turn to the monument itself, to consider – concretely – how the work’s aesthetics reflect, imagine, and create the reality of Albanian socialism.

4. Mother Albania and the winds of history

It is perhaps ironic that one of the ways that Rama, Hadëri, and Dhrami set about making the figure of Mother Albania “of its time”30 was to reintroduce a decidedly “Modernist” aesthetic. If Mother Albania no longer looked like a ballerina, it was in part because the figure itself took on the geometric characteristics generally present in the ensemble accompanying figurative sculptures in martyrs’ cemeteries. In essence, Mother Albania’s body itself became a lapidar: her left arm jutting out horizontally, her right arm holding aloft the star nearly always found atop lapidars.31 To create the feeling of perpetual forward motion and dynamism, and to counter the rigid frontal verticality of the woman’s body, the sculptors extended Mother Albania’s robes back, transforming them into angular, almost Futurist waves that terminate in stark, geometric shapes. In doing so, they introduced an entirely new image of the female body: rather than the often quite clingy robes characteristic of classical sculpture, Mother Albania’s garb transformed her corporeality into something at once rigid and dynamic. On the one hand, her whole body appears to be dissolving and then reforming, flowing back and out, metamorphosing, abstracting into pure, directed motion. At the same time, however, her starkly vertical poise and stoic visage appear as the coalescence of the abstracted pleats flowing out behind her; in her, the winds of history and change crystallize and become legible. This second reading seems particularly appropriate in light of the sculpture’s place in the martyrs’ cemetery: Mother Albania represents the materialization of the sacrifice of those buried in her shadow. The horizontality of historical narrative is elevated to a higher level of meaning, of metaphor, by the upward thrust of her hand raised and grasping the star and laurel branch.

Seen from a distance, winding one’s way up the road leading to Tirana’s Martyrs’ Cemetery, Mother Albania is primarily frontal, rising straight and tall like a guardian. However, upon entering the cemetery complex, one mounts the stairs and approaches the sculpture from the side, finally coming around to stand before the work and gaze up. This trajectory emphasizes the latter reading of the figure, from flow of history, forward into coalesced body, and finally upward into symbol (and thus into ‘reality’). The body of Mother Albania therefore serves not merely as a symbol of the nation as a whole, but specifically as the visualization of a collective history, creating a unified narrative of the nation.

In 1971, Alfred Çapaliku described the construction underway on the new Martyrs’ Cemetery: “Every piece of marble they lay in place in the beautiful, level surface of the martyrs’ cemetery links together three times. They extend into the past, in the present, and into the future.”32 Mother Albania performs a similar function: it brings together time under the aegis of national history, making the sacrifice of the past tangible and legible even as it gazes with certainty into tomorrow.

5. Enver Hoxha and Mother Albania: The dictator, the nation, and history

On May 5, 1985, on the first Martyrs’ Day following Enver Hoxha’s death, a print by Josif Droboniku was published in Drita (fig. 3). The image shows the profile of Mother Albania, and in her flowing robes the faces of a multitude of partisans, men and women who gave their lives in the struggle to build the nation that communist Albania envisioned. These numerous smaller faces float around one central face, larger than all the others: that of Enver Hoxha. Droboniku’s print visualizes another link in the conceptual chain that Mother Albania, as a monument, attempts to create: it establishes the relationship between the dictator and the nation-as-mother, and at the same time between the dictator and the course of the nation’s collective narrative. It is perhaps fitting that Hoxha, who was instrumental in the choice of the Mother Albania motif for the cemetery, finds his own image swept up within the symbolic transformation of time. In Mother Albania’s robes, in the flows that ebb between the abstract abyss of the past and the conscious realization of national Spirit, Hoxha – together with the nation itself – crystallizes into the comprehensible form of national history.

Nearly three decades later, on May 5, 2014, this very relationship – between the image of the dictator and that of Mother Albania – became an object of controversy. While the Albanian heads of state, including Prime Minister Edi Rama (the son of sculptor Kristaq Rama) placed wreaths of flowers before Mother Albania to honor the nation’s fallen, several members of the

30 And, one imagines, to solve the problem of no accompanying architectonic or abstract elements, as well as to distance the work conceptually from a sculpture like the Statue of Liberty.
31 Here, there is a much deeper discussion to be had about the transformation of the female body in the service of socialist realist (and nationalist) aesthetics, but it is beyond my current scope.
The Communist Party of Albania carrying portraits of Enver Hoxha were prevented from entering the cemetery complex by guards. On the previous November 29, for the celebration of national Liberation, the Communist Party had brought their large portrait of Hoxha into the cemetery; it had been seen looming behind the new leaders of Albanian government, and on Martyrs’ Day, 2014, a distance needed to be preemptively (re-)established between the image of the dictator and the image of the collective history of the nation. This meant separating Hoxha from Mother Albania, extracting him from the flow of history and keeping his representation out of the hallowed space of the Cemetery of the Martyrs of the Nation. This enforcement of distance – begun in April of 1992, when Hoxha’s grave was removed from the martyrs’ cemetery and relocated to the municipal cemetery – should prompt us to return to the reading of Mother Albania that sees her figure dissolving, losing its legibility in momentum. In the period following the fall of communism in Albania, history has become – in many instances – unstable, characterized by gaps and forgetfulness, by an often destructive decentering of the past. If the Mother Albania monument still stands as a symbol for the nation and its narrative, this narrative is visualized not only in the implacable visage of the mother but also in the abstract and shifting flow of her robes, the flow that sweeps the past into oblivion.

Fig. 3 Josif Droboniku, Untitled print, from Drita, May 5, 1985.