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Visual Culture in Communist Albania: Photography and Photographers at the Time of the Stockmann-Sokoli Expedition (1957)

Gilles Rapper (de)

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Visual culture in communist Albania: Photography and Photographers at the time of the Stockmann-Sokoli expedition (1957)

Gilles de Rapper (Aix-en-Provence)

Apart from ethnomusicological data and observations, the Stockmann-Sokoli expedition of summer 1957 left what might be called by-products.¹ One of them is the collection of photographs taken before and during the ethnomusicologists' trip in Southern Albania by Wilfried Fiedler, the linguist of the team.² This set of several hundred photographs in colour and black-and-white is a valuable testimony of the kind of images of communist Albania that were emerging at that time. It is interesting to look at them in the context of their production, not only because they document the situation of the country in the second half of the 1950s (we will see that they can barely be used for that purpose), but because they form a photographic record of a kind that will not live long after the deterioration of relations with the Soviet Union. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the difference between this outsider and individual gaze, and those proposed at the same time by local photographers. The activity of foreign photographers, much less noticeable after the break with the Soviet Union in 1961, is thus an opportunity to compare the different gazes and to highlight the specificities of the local production. This is not trivial, given the fact that the visual culture of communist Albania has received little attention apart from the most spectacular aspects of the falsification of photographs and the cult of personality.³ The situation of the 1970s and 1980s, moreover, is better known than that of earlier periods both because of the number of surviving witnesses and of the sheer scale of the photographic production of these later decades. Yet the 1950s saw the introduction of a number of institutions that played a key role in the development of Albanian photography and in its uses. For all these reasons, in what follows I take as a pretext the photographic collection of Wilfried Fiedler, in its content and in its conditions of production, to analyse the situation of Albanian photography in 1957. For this, I begin by presenting the collection and its context, i.e. Albania and its relations with the Communist world before 1961. I then turn to the situation of contemporary Albanian photography to highlight the specificities of Wilfried Fiedler's photographs and dwell on a determining criterion: colour. I conclude with considerations on photography and modernity.

1 I would like to thank Anouck Durand for her comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2 Apart from Fiedler it seems that also Erich Stockmann and at least one Albanian participant had cameras as well. Kyritz the technician instead bought postcards as souvenirs.

3 See, however, VORPSI 2014 on the image of women in the official press. See also DURAND 2014; DE RAPPER and DURAND 2011a, 2012.

1. A photographic record of 1957 Albania?

My analysis is based on little more than eighty photographs made available by Wilfried Fiedler. They represent only a small portion of the 635 photographs taken during his three trips in Albania between 1956 and 1959 (in winter 1956–1957, summer 1957 and summer 1959). These are divided into 389 colour photographs made on Agfacolorfilms, and 246 black-and-white photographs on Agfa Isopan F/Rapid. Wilfried Fiedler had a Praktica camera, an East-German product that was to be largely used by Albanian photographers in the following decades, but he does not remember if he had used two cameras, one for black-and-white and one for colour, or if he would alternate black-and-white and colour films in a single camera.⁴ A colour photograph showing him holding a camera around his neck, in the summer of 1957, suggests however that he used two cameras, at least during the expedition itself. He brought his own films from Germany and would develop them on his return. Neither the supply of films, let alone colour film, or laboratory work seemed safe enough to him in Albania. Contacts with local photographers were in this way limited. By the end of 1956, during a preparatory two-month stay, he nevertheless met a journalist from Tirana, a photography enthusiast, Piro Naçe (1928–2006).⁵ The latter was in charge of accompanying him through Albania, a task that was frequently entrusted to him because of his knowledge of Slavic languages (he studied journalism in Zagreb and in Prague after 1948). At that time, Wilfried Fiedler spoke only fragmentary Albanian, while he was fluent in Czech. Piro Naçe had brought back from his stay in Czechoslovakia a Rolleiflex camera with which he made photographs of their trip.⁶ Unfortunately, these were not made available to me. In the following years, Piro Naçe has been recognized as a photographer and later as a historian of photography.

Despite the scientific mission entrusted to him and the fact that he was a member of the Institut für deutsche Volkskunde in Berlin, Wilfried Fiedler took photographs for his own account. No one, he says, had asked him to take pictures. His collection is thus the result of a personal initiative and reflects the interests and taste of his author, while most of the local photographic production consisted already of commissioned photography. This relative freedom vis-à-vis his employer does not mean he could photograph everything. During his trip in winter 1956–1957 as during the expedition in summer 1957, he was always accompanied and the team had limited access to sensitive areas, especially to the borderlands with Greece.⁷ Recognizing these limitations, he avoided taking photographs that may be considered as inappropriate in the context of the expedition. He succeeded to do this with at least two exceptions: in one case he captured a border guard with his shepherd dog patrolling on a boat on Lake Butrinti in the border area with Greece, in another occasion he photographed a Roma marriage in Tirana. For the latter he was arrested and questioned by the police.⁸ Altogether, his practice can be seen as the result of a complex set of expectations and limitations, both personal and institutional.

4 Wilfried Fiedler, personal communication, Tirana, October 2013.

5 see FIEDLER this volume.

6 Interview with Robert Naçe, Tirana, October 2013.

7 PISTRICK 2005: 50.

8 It is not entirely clear that these photographs were taken during the expedition of 1957, they could have been shot also during Fiedler's preparatory stay in Winter 1956. Wilfried Fiedler, personal communication, Tirana, October 2013.

Looking at the content of the collection, all the images that we know can be divided into several categories according to their themes and motifs. Some photographs reflect the scientific objective of the expedition, but they do not seem to have been taken systematically: Wilfried Fiedler photographs musical instruments, musicians and singers. More broadly, he is interested in „ethnography” understood as „material culture” and photographs for instance the traditional activities of spinning, weaving or the manufacture of agricultural tools, whether observed by chance or being staged for the expedition (as suggested by the installation of a loom in a farmyard and the curiosity it arouses).



Image 4: A loom in a farmyard near Koplik (?), North Albania, on the right: radio journalist Ursula Enderle (photo by Wilfried Fiedler, Winter 1956/1957).

source: Private collection Wilfried Fiedler

Traditional costumes occupy a large place and Wilfried Fiedler takes advantage of his colour films to render their richness. Again, some of the photographs appear to have been taken from life on the street and markets, while others are staged, perhaps during a performance. Traditional architecture also holds his attention, whether civil or religious.⁹

⁹ These images do not exhaust the photographic documentation of the expedition itself: several photographs probably by the Albanian members of the expeditions are kept in IAKSA, Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike in Tirana. On the other hand, the collection of Erich Stockmann, leader of the expedition, is preserved at Berlin Phonogram-Archive, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Prussian Cultural Heritage.

Wilfried Fiedler's collection also offers an original look of the expedition itself: it documents the conditions of travel and work of the team members. Several photographs were taken on the road during stops or encounters. Others show the members of the expedition at rest, during moments that evoke holidays by the sea or in the mountains. They remind us that Albania was then, in the communist world, a tourist destination. Its climate and Mediterranean landscapes, as well as the exoticism of its Ottoman past and its position as a rural country remaining largely on the margins of modernity, were an attraction for visitors from Northern Europe. Some reports for the summer of 1957 indicate the presence of Soviet tourists in Durrës, of course, but also of East German, Czech, Hungarian and Polish ones.¹⁰ It is in 1958 that a camp for East German youth opened its doors in Durrës. It was closed down only after the summer season of 1961.¹¹ All these tourists took pictures on the beach, but were closely monitored by the police.¹² In this sense Wilfried Fiedler's photos attest the situation of Albania within the communist world in the late 1950s as a destination for travellers and tourists.

Two other genres make Wilfried Fiedler's collection close to tourist photography. Street scenes, especially on a market day, are frequent. Less directly oriented towards photographic documentation than ethnographic photographs, they probably intended to reproduce a particular mood or atmosphere.¹³ What is striking, in addition to the interest in traditional means of transport (including oxcarts), is the presence of disorderly gatherings: men and women thronged the markets or through the streets in images that contrast with those published at the same time in Albania. In the latter, in fact, the public space is shown for its orderliness and limited silhouettes of pedestrians are the only human element. What interests Wilfried Fiedler is not the staging of a modern and orderly public space, but the presence of the peasant world in the heart of cities. In fact, contemporary books still advertise the picturesque markets and neighbourhoods occupied by artisans as places to be visited.¹⁴ In most cities, they disappear in the 1960s as part of the process of urbanization and industrialization: they are seen at the same time as oriental and as competing with the state organisation of trade.

Landscapes are also common. Some have an obvious documentary purpose, as when they set a village or town in their environment; others are more overtly linked to emotion, as in the case of pictures taken at dawn or dusk, or that of the Ionian coast.

Finally, Wilfried Fiedler made portraits. Two close-ups, one of an elderly woman given in silhouette in black clothes on the white wall of a house, the other of a beggar with a turban sitting against a wall are remarkable in this respect. They are radically different from the most common portraits of the era, which put the stress, on the contrary, on youth, optimism and *joie de vivre*.

10 NGJELA 2011: 207.

11 VELO 2005: 81–82.

12 TUNGER 2000: 54 for the year 1959.

13 On the distinction between photographic documentation and documentary photography, see LUGON 2011.

14 See the books by KIESLING 1958 and DE JOUVENEL 1958 discussed below.



Image 5 Beggar on the streets of Tirana (photo by Wilfried Fiedler, Winter 1956/1957).
source: Private collection Wilfried Fiedler

In its themes and in its choices, Wilfried Fiedler's collection is not a unique case. It presents an image of Albania in the 1950s that can be found more or less in the works of other travellers and photographers.¹⁵ Until the end of this decade, in fact, good relations between Albania and the Soviet Union and the Communist world in general allowed the arrival of tourists and visitors, journalists and photographers from abroad. The first fifteen years of communist Albania are thus in continuity with the period between the two world wars, which saw a major photographic production on Albania. The case of Branimir Gušić (1901–1975) is exemplary in this regard. This doctor from Zagreb, mountaineering and geography enthusiast, travelled to Albania before World War II and again in 1947. The breakdown of relations between Albania and Yugoslavia in 1948 interrupted his travels and those of other Yugoslav travellers. He leaves from his last trip a photographic record consisting mostly of landscapes and photographs of traditional architecture¹⁶. The human element however is poorly represented, the streets are deserted and landscapes show only few silhouettes, what distinguishes this collection from Wilfried Fiedler's.

15 See for example the visual imagery provided in Seliger discussed by Ludwig this volume.

16 110 photographs from the collection are available on <http://www.albanianphotography.net/gusic/> (10.11.2014).

What unites them nevertheless, is the invisibility of communist power: in 1947, no evidence suggests the takeover by the Communists in Branimir Gušić's photographs. In 1956–1957, they are still missing in the images taken by Wilfried Fiedler: one can barely see, at the corner of an image, the bottom of an official portrait, a badge on the lapel of a jacket or a slogan on the Albanian–Soviet friendship painted on the wall of a house.



Image 6: Wilfried Fiedler posing with his camera in front of a house with the slogan „Friendship with the Soviet Union”, Xarra, Çamëria (photo by a member of the Stockmann-Sokoli expedition 3.7.1957)

source: Private collection Wilfried Fiedler

Both photographers were acting as private observers, unwilling to give a political message. Again, this is in sharp contrast with local photographers, even with those who are not directly involved in propaganda or press photography, who are largely documenting the political changes, either in 1947 or in 1957. One can ask if this corresponds to the unwillingness of the expedition to record – despite the insistence of the Albanian colleagues – songs of the „New Folklore“ praising Enver and his party.¹⁷

The case is different with other photographers more directly involved in propaganda. In 1959, a volume of photographs signed by Gerhard Kiesling (born 1922) is published in Leipzig.¹⁸ The author had been a photographer for the *Neue Berliner Illustrierte* magazines since 1949. The volume, entitled *Albanien*, includes 142 photographs, of which eight are in

¹⁷ On the „New Folklore“ see PISTRICK 2005: 72–73.

¹⁸ KIESLING 1958 has provided as well photographs for the GDR edition of Kurt Seliger's *Land der Adlersöhne* (1960), see contribution by Ludwig same volume.

colour. Revealingly, fourteen of them are not from the author, but primarily from the Albanian Telegraphic Agency (six photographs) and from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the German Democratic Republic (five photographs): it is clearly an official publication, a tool for the promotion of tourism and ideology, and it carries a clear political message. The long preface, due to Ruth Walter, is a glowing overview of the achievements of the regime in Tirana. The meaning of the message is as follows: Albania is a traditional Mediterranean country undergoing rapid modernization; it is both a tourist destination and a socialist country. Unlike Wilfried Fiedler's collection, Gerhard Kiesling's photographs operate on two registers: they picture both traditional Albania, with its popular costumes, markets and means of transportation, and industrial Socialist Albania, with its factories, the mechanization of agriculture and „aksion”(voluntary labour) of the youth. The layout itself plays with this contrast by linking for instance bullock carts and buses, a minaret and a factory chimney. Somehow, the valorisation of the modernization undertaken by the communists is inseparable from the valorisation of several traditional aspects, which are presented as scenic elements contributing to the tourist attraction of the country.

The same tension between the two sides of the message appears in another book published in the same years by Renaud de Jouvenel (1907–1982), writer and essayist close to the French Communist Party. *Les enfants de l'aigle* (*The children of the eagle*), published in 1958 after a trip to Albania together with the photographer Jacques Kanapa (1928–1996), is an apology for the Soviet Union's influence in Albania.¹⁹ The text emphasizes the contrast between the poverty and oppression of the pre-war period and the freedom and prosperity brought by the Communists. However, the twelve photographs illustrating the book provide no picture of modernization: they only show markets and traditional costumes, churches and mosques, and barefoot women carrying water. Interestingly, some images are very similar to those taken by Wilfried Fiedler, such as the „donkey's parking lot”, on a market day in Gjirokastra.

For these travellers from the north or west of Europe, Albania is a Mediterranean country, a „Picturesque Albania”, to borrow the title of a book published in 1959 by the *New Albania* magazine and intended for foreign visitors.²⁰ Its appeal lies in the persistence of traditional features that evoke both the Mediterranean (the sea and the mountains, cypress and olive trees, white houses) and the Orient (mosques, Orthodox churches, colourful markets). It is in this context and in this iconographic register that Wilfried Fiedler's collection is located. At the same time, however, Albanian photographers' vision, as already suggested, was contrasting with this register; they were bringing about a new world, radically different.

2. Photography and photographers in Communist Albania

Wilfried Fiedler's trips to Albania happen at a time when photography is booming, although following a different route compared to East Germany and other countries of the Soviet bloc. Relatively well established in the major cities by 1957, photography is still largely absent in rural areas. Some images of the Fiedler collection show the public curiosity aroused by the presence of the foreign photographer.

19 DE JOUVENEL 1958.

20 *L'Albanie pittoresque* 1959.



Image 7: A girl from Zadrima posing at the Shkodra cattle market, North Albania between 24.-28.5.1957 (photo by Wilfried Fiedler)

source: Private collection Wilfried Fiedler

A few years later, in his account of a visit to an agricultural cooperative, the writer Jakov Xoxamakes fun of the reaction of farmers who saw a camera for the first time and compared it to “a third eye on my belly²¹“. Due to the state politics towards photography and photographers, initiated as early as 1945, things were however changing rapidly and photography became more and more familiar to everyone. In what follows, I present the main aspect of this dissemination of photography in Communist Albania.

It is beyond the scope of this article to compare the private (or semi-private)²² and limited production of Wilfried Fiedler to the photographic production of communist Albania as

21 *Revista Ylli*, March 1961: 10–11.

22 Camera and film developing were financed by the Institut für deutsche Volkskunde. So, Fiedlers material basis as well as his gaze were at the same time private and official. He had to provide „scientific evidence and documentation“ to his employing institution, while at the same time he used the camera for documenting his private interests and for documenting his astonishment about the first foreign country he visited. What concerns the material basis he was working with camera equipment and film material from the Institute however he could keep his semi-private photos for himself. Only

a whole. Such a comparison would have to take into account both the diverging and converging processes involved in the production and reception of these various set of photographs. For instance, Wilfried Fiedler's photographs have been preserved until today, either as a private archive or as part of the institutional archive of the expedition. Many Albanian photographers on the contrary had to deliver their production to institutions that no longer exist today or even had to destroy their negatives. The comparison would also raise the question of amateur photography as opposed to professional photography.²³ Wilfried Fiedler can be described as an amateur (he is not employed as a photographer) but a part of his production is commissioned and turned into photographic documentation, which was also the case with Albanian amateurs. A look at the Albanian photographers of the time and at their images allows nevertheless to highlight some features of Wilfried Fiedler's collection as well as of Albanian photography.

Since 1945, the authorities set up a state organization of photography that covers just about every need. This concerns first the field of „propaganda”, which includes press photography. The central institution here is the Albanian Telegraphic Agency (ATA), which has a photo lab since 1947 and has a dozen photojournalists. In 1957, it is firmly established as the sole news agency in Albania. It is a tool in the hands of the regime and its photojournalists give of Albania the picture required by the Party of Labour. Within the ATA as in other institutions (including ministries), photographers document the achievements of the regime in all areas, in accordance with guidance issued in 1951 on the need to affirm the legitimacy of the new government by showing its accomplishments, particularly in the field of industry.²⁴ The first manifestations of the country's industrialization appear in the 1950s thanks to the support received from the Soviet Union: the decade saw the opening of the Stalin textile factory in Yzberisht, 4 km west of Tirana, of the sugar refinery in Maliq and of the Lenin hydro-electric power plant in Tirana. The shape of cities changes, primarily that of Tirana, for example with the completion of the building of the Central Committee in 1956. New buildings, official buildings and residential buildings become recurring motifs of photographic propaganda just as the mechanization of agriculture, embodied by the combine harvester. While these first signs of the country's modernization are over-represented in commissioned photography, they seem to be totally absent from Wilfried Fiedler's collection.

Photographers also document the activity of officials, not only for publication in the press but also for the establishment of archives. The Central Committee has its own photographic service that is preparing year after year photographic albums reporting the activities of its members: congresses, visits to factories and farms, reception of foreign delegations, etc.²⁵ Albums of 1957 cover both the visit of delegations from Bulgarian and French

some of them were integrated into the „official selection” united with the stock of Stockmann's photos in the Berlin Phonogram-Archive. This was a privilege if we consider the fact that most Albanian photographers had to destroy their negatives. Eckehard Pistrick, personal communication, February 2015.

23 Among the growing body of literature on amateur photography, see, for Eastern Europe, Crowley In: APOR, APOR and REES (eds.) 2008: 93–114.

24 FUGA 2010: 54.

25 Since December 1992, these albums are kept in the State Archive in Tirana, as part of the Archives of the Central Committee.

communist parties in January and June and the inauguration of the University of Tirana in September. Beyond the central institutions, photography is everywhere in the service of the regime. In rural areas, amateur or professional photographers, private or public, document the economic and political activities in their communities. They offer the new communist power an image of its reality, in all places and at all times: inaugurations, celebrations, commemorations, visits of delegations and elections are an opportunity to show the ubiquity of power²⁶. The absence of the Party's power in Wilfried Fiedler's photographs is all the more striking.

Photography is also in the service of population control. Between 1948 and 1954 the first national campaign of passport photographs is organized: photographers (mostly private) are entrusted to photograph all inhabitants aged over sixteen years, in village after village.²⁷ In this way, photography is imposed on to the entire population as a state technology. Several photographers working for the Ministry of Interior also document the activity of border guards at a time when the country is surrounded by „enemies”. In 1957, in the region of Korça, several arrests of people trying to cross the border into Greece are documented in that manner, and their authors are photographed. These images were displayed in albums and public exhibitions. The free and sometimes playful character of Wilfried Fiedler's photographs must not let us forget that at the same time photography was not an innocent technology: it produced images that were tools in the hands of state power.

Outside propaganda and population control, the year 1957 saw the strengthening of „scientific photography”, which is relevant here insofar as it also includes ethnographic documentation. If the first ethnographic and archaeological expeditions of the 1950s produced a photographic documentation, it is especially after the opening of the University of Tirana in September 1957 and the creation of his darkroom that photography becomes a tool for research and dissemination. We can mention here the name of Mehmet Kallfa (1913–1972) who, after having worked at the ATA since 1945, joined the Institute of Archaeology in 1957 as a photographer.

Overall, here as elsewhere, photography is used as a modern technology serving the modernization of the state and the country: whether it is to provide all the inhabitants with an identity card, to document the industrialization of the country or to form ethnographic archives, photography is part of the effort to modernize life and society.²⁸ The ambition to record reality for the needs of the state is itself a feature of modernity.²⁹ In this paradigm, that of photography as a documentation tool, photography participates also to expand the “*horizon du regard*”³⁰ by providing evidence of the existence of realities that are beyond the direct knowledge that members of local communities can have. In this case, it contributes to the unity of the state and the nation. Beyond the recording of reality, photography, as André Rouillé reminds us, „fabricates the world”, it makes it happen.³¹

26 See for example, for the 1940s and 1950s, the production of Safet Dokle in the region of Kukës (DOKLE 2004: 20–41).

27 On this campaign, see DE RAPPER and DURAND 2011a.

28 It should be noted however that, contrary to what happened in the older industrial countries, photographic industry never existed in Albania: all photographic equipment had to be imported.

29 LEMAGNY and ROUILLE 1986: 126.

30 ROUILLE 2005: 100.

31 ROUILLE 2005: 86.

Apart from these political or collective uses of photography, the satisfaction of individual needs (especially through family photography and souvenir photography)³² is also transformed by the new organization. The Communist period saw the collectivization and gradual and total nationalization of photographers as a professional group (they are all state-employed in state-run enterprises), until the disappearance of private studios that existed after World War II. The year 1957 is mid-way in this process. Collectivization began ten years before with the opening of the first public studios in the handicraft cooperatives; it ends a decade later, in 1969, with the transformation of cooperatives into state enterprises and the closing of the last private studios.³³ In the 1950s, cooperative studios open throughout the country, especially in small towns remained on the side-lines of the development of photography in the Interwar period: in Kukës in 1955, Cërrik in 1956, and in Bilisht in 1958, to name a few. These studios offer their services for portrait and wedding photography and are also responsible for covering the political, economic and cultural activities in the region. The result is an unprecedented diffusion of photography in the country. It is felt in the 1960s with the proliferation of family albums. In the 1950s, however, inequalities in access to photography are still evident between Tirana and the cities of Shkodra and Korça, historical bases for the dissemination of photography, on the one hand, and the rest of the country, on the other. In 1957, the sophisticated portraits made in the famous Foto Studio Sporti of Refik Veseli (1926–2002) in Tirana, are in contrast to the images of rural residents taken by cooperative photographers. Uniformity and standardization of family photography, which are often associated with the communist period, appear only later, in the 1970s and 1980s.

The 1950s finally saw the emergence of a phenomenon that is interesting to compare with the case of Wilfried Fiedler. Relations with the Soviet Union provided an opportunity for many Albanians to leave to study abroad. As we have seen with Piro Naçe, many of them returned with a camera they used themselves or they sold on the second-hand market: this was a new base for the development of amateur photography. From the mid-1950s, the phenomenon is growing, to the point of receiving official encouragement: starting in 1957–1958, in Tirana, photography courses are taught in the houses of culture for young people; the heads of houses of culture are themselves trained in photography. From the early 1960s, the magazine *Ylli*, major illustrated magazine of the time, published advice to amateur photographers and organized an annual photographic competition open to amateurs.³⁴ In this respect, the situation in Albania can be compared to other countries in the East as well as in the West, where amateur photography became popular in the 1950s. In Albania, however, the supply difficulties regarding photographic equipment and the climate of suspicion that hangs over amateur photographers (who are accused of taking the work of cooperative photographers and of making subversive photographs) hinder the further development of

32 Picturesque souvenir photographs were circulating also among foreign tourists. In the estate of Johannes Kyritz, the technician of the expedition, was found a set of approximately 30 postcards which he had brought from the 1957 expedition. Among them are postcards printed during the Italian occupation time in WWII, newly printed socialist postcards but also coloured postcards dating back to the WWI period. Eckehard Pistrick, personal communication, February 2015.

33 de Rapper and Durand In: PISTRICK, Eckehard, Nicola SCALDAFERRI and Gretel SCHWÖRER (eds.) 2011b: 210–229.

34 DURAND and DE RAPPER 2012.

amateur practice. The situation in this field is deteriorating in the late 1960s. To photograph outside the framework provided by the state is a risky business. Amateur practice is generally limited to the domestic sphere or framed by institutional activities. But already in 1957, the approach of Wilfried Fiedler, who travels the country, photographing whatever he is interested in with the set of expectations and limitations mentioned above, falls within the unthinkable for local amateurs.

Moreover, despite the popularization of photography, a criterion remains that distinguishes Albanian photography (and even in Albania, various uses and users of photography), and that is glaring in comparison with Wilfried Fiedler's collection: this is colour.

3. Colour – a determining criterion

What is remarkable in Wilfried Fiedler's collection is the emphasis placed on colour photography (389 images out of 635 in total) and its technical quality. The film used, Agfacolor, was not new: it had been available since 1936 and its production continued after World War II in East Germany until 1964. However, we must remember that in the late 1950s the status and legitimacy of colour photography were not established in the field of photojournalism, nor of artistic photography.³⁵

Moreover, in 1957, colour photography was virtually unknown in Albania. In fact, 1957 is cited as one of the first tests of colour negatives by Jani Ristani (1913–2005), who worked as a photographer at the Ministry of Construction. It is at the Youth Festival in Tirana in July³⁶ and upon the visit to Albania of Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh in August that he made his first colour photographs, developed and printed by himself. He worked with samples of Agfa colour film provided by the German company upon the occasion of delivery of photographic material the Albimport, the import agency of the Albanian regime.³⁷ Tests were also conducted at the ATA and at the University in 1959.³⁸ Tests of colour slides had occurred around 1954 or 1955, without substantial results. After 1960, some photographers were sent to China to learn a technique of colour photography that will hardly be applied afterwards.³⁹

It was not until 1967 that the magazine *Ylli*, the most prestigious of the illustrated magazines, turned to colour photography under the leadership of its photographer, Petrit Kumi (born 1930), returning from a trip to China. Until then, the colour images published in the magazine were coloured black-and-white photographs. Other magazines followed afterwards. The ATA experimented with a first colour lab in 1974 and its employees then used a manual for colour photography prepared the year before by the head of the photographic department, Ilo Vero Gollosi (1922–1991). But it was not until 1981 that a modern colour laboratory, imported from Italy at the initiative of Kostandin Leka (1932–2013) became operational.⁴⁰

35 BOULOUCH 2011: 117.

36 See the photograph of girls dressed in traditional costume published in *Gazeta Shqiptare*, October 6, 2013: 17.

37 Interview with Katjusha Kumi, former assistant to Jani Ristani, Tirana, October 2013.

38 LEKA 2013: 86–91.

39 DURAND 2014.

40 LEKA 2013: 255–271.

In the public service, it was not until the mid-1980s that the studio Skënderbeu in Tirana, one of the first in the country, offered colour photography to its customers. In 1957, private studios, such as the already mentioned Foto Studio Sporti, still offered quality colorization, but in the following decades the skills were lost. For many common people, colour photography became accessible only after the fall of the regime.

Of course, some were privileged: the first colour photos of Enver Hoxha appear to date from 1958. These are not official photographs, but private images published only after his death in 1985.⁴¹ His bodyguard, who also acted as a personal photographer, was then developing his colour films in the Soviet Union. After the breakdown with Russia in 1961, Jani Ristani was called to make colour photography available to the dictator in the framework of a „secret laboratory” dedicated to members of the Politburo.

The long and tortuous history of the introduction of colour photography in communist Albania attests the challenge posed by mastering this technique, which is more modern than black-and-white photography and transmits more strongly the message of optimism and dynamism promoted by the ideology of the State.⁴²

4. Conclusion: Representing Modernity

Wilfried Fiedler’s collection appears as paradoxical: it implements a modern technology, colour photography, to serve a representation of the least modern aspects of Albanian society of the time: traditional costumes, rural architecture, means of transportation. By contrast, Albanian photography of the time, restricted to black-and-white photography, emphasizes the representation of modernity: urbanization, industrialization, feminization of society, modern weapons... It does so easily by the repetition of certain motifs (combine harvester, factory chimney...) and composition (oblique lines, low angle shot), inherited from modernist trends of photography, most notably from the Soviet Union.⁴³

When colour is used, either by the colouring or by the use of colour film, it seems to have a specific function that can be summarized as follows: the sky is blue, the flags are red. Blue, the colour of happiness, and red, the colour of socialism, are the dominant shades. It is telling that even after the introduction of colour film, retouching continues to be effectuated regularly: figures are detached on a plain blue background and highlights of red mark the flags, pieces of clothing and slogans. Wilfried Fiedler’s photographs, which are not subject in the same way to political imperatives, are not familiar with this obsession of blue and red. The skies are not always blue, sometimes they are even threatening, and the patches of colour are more diverse.

The difference is also reflected in the representation of „the people.” In ethnographic photography of the time it is absent, only the objects are represented. Clothing can be photographed on models, but they are isolated, cut (probably also by cropping) of context. Later, they will be staged in the recreated scenes evoking traditional Albania. In press

41 GRADECI 1986: 224.

42 For a comparison with the photographic production in the GDR see STIFTUNG DEUTSCHES HISTORISCHES MUSEUM (ed.) 2013.

43 Soviet photographic magazines were still available to professional photographers after 1961. For the role of oblique lines and against Angle in soviet avant-garde photography of the Interwar period, see LEMAGNY and ROUILLE 1986: 127–129.

photography, the people is present, but as an organized group; it is staged: it moves forward, it smiles, it admires and listens to the guide. Here on the contrary, we see images of amorphous crowds and casual gatherings. The staging does not forward the image of the socialist New Man. Sometimes the show seems to be more behind the camera than in front: the photographer seems to be at the heart of much attention as its subject.

More than in colour, it is in this shift from the codes of official photography that lies the main interest of Wilfried Fiedler's collection. In a way, one could almost say his pictures are subversive, as they emphasize aspects of the Albanian reality that socialist state ideology would not see or reject in the past. A double-page published in the magazine *New Albania* in 1959 illustrates the contrasting status of certain photographic motifs.

Entitled „Two dates, two times,” it presents the years 1938 and 1959 as „two diametrically opposite dates in the history of Albania”: on one side, the misery and injustice of the regime of Zog, on the other, the considerable efforts made by the „power of the people” for the economy, health and education. On the left and on the right sides of the double-page, images symbolize this contrast. For 1959, we see a hydroelectric dam, a factory, combine harvesters and the building of the University of Tirana. In 1938, we see young boys, barefoot and poorly dressed, peasant women dressed in black, a ploughman leading a coupling of buffalos, a thatched hut and a swamp, a symbol of the misuse of land. The absence of a legend shows that these photographs are not there to provide information, but to convey a message based on a pre-existing code. Yet, if we had to locate the photographs taken by Wilfried Fiedler between 1956 and 1959 in this opposition, it is unquestionably on the side of 1938, and not of 1959, that they would find their place. They show that poor and rural Albania does not belong to the past and that what propaganda rejects in the years before the World War II still exists twelve years after the communist takeover.

At the same time, the approach of Wilfried Fiedler is not defeatist or pessimistic, as will be that of Western photographers picturing Albania after 1990 in black-and-white. The use of colour helps to embellish reality, as it will in propaganda photography ten years later, in the late 1960s. Wilfried Fiedler does not seek to expose the backwardness of Albanian society, but he is sensitive to the picturesque elements, in the etymological sense of the word, of rural Albania. His images are in this regard different from those that have survived in rural areas through family albums, and which are also less directly subject to the codes of propaganda photography. In these pictures, in 1957, we also see the rural poor and barefoot children, but the technical means used by local photographers limit the idealization of the models. In the history of post-war Albanian photography, idealization of rural and traditional Albania appears only later, in the 1970s.⁴⁴

Wilfried Fiedler's collection thus contributes to bring about an Albania that will not survive the rupture of relations with the Soviet bloc in 1961, a traditional and rural Albania, but colourful. It is one of the possible gazes on Albania in 1957, a look undoubtedly marked by the personality of its author, but also by the relative position of the photographer and his referent in the Communist world at the time, and by the opportunities offered by a scientific expedition. In this meaning, notwithstanding its originality and invaluable interest for our knowledge of communist Albania in 1957, we have to be careful not to see Wilfried Fiedler's collection as bringing an image of Albania closer to reality than the one proposed

44 See for example DOJAKA, ZOJZI and QATIPi (eds.) 1976.

by local commissioned photography. Its sharp contrast with official photography does not mean that it reveals a kind of truth concealed by propaganda photography. Truly, the comparison we have just attempted attests that the codes of propaganda photography were already well established by 1957, with their focus on modernization and on the leading role of the Party. A large part of the local photographic production is the result of a process of selection and staging around a limited number of themes and motifs. Wilfried Fiedler's photographs are however the result of other processes – including those related to scientific collaboration between Albania and East Germany – and as such are also submitted to certain codes. Beyond the generally assumed standardisation of photography in communist Albania, we should be aware of this plurality of codes and gazes, and look at the way they emerge and interfere.

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