

BETWEEN APATHY AND NOSTALGIA

Public and Private Recollections
of Communism in Contemporary Albania



Edited by **Jonila Godole** and **Idrit Idrizi**



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Between Apathy and Nostalgia
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Contents

Introduction. Memory and Portrayal of Communism in Albania in the Public and in the Private Sphere

Jonila Godole & Idrir Idrizi

7

Public Depictions and Discourses

Specters of Communism. Albanian Post-Socialist Studies and the Return of the Communist Repressed

Federico Boni

15

Ruins, Bodies, and Pyramids: Exploring Communist Ruins and Memory Politics in Albania

Kailey Rocker

24

Bunk'Art Project – A Glimpse into the Communist Past in Albania

Alsena Kokalari

34

Pragmatist Politics on Memory and Oblivion. Post-Communist Attitudes towards Communist Museology in Albania

Konstantinos Giakoumis

46

Everyone for and against Communism. The Paradoxes of the Change in the Political System 1990–1992 and of Its Memory

Afrim Krasniqi

60

Remembrance between the Public and the Private Sphere

The Young Generation's Borrowed Memory of the Communist Period

Jonila Godole

73

Typologies of Private Memories of Communism in Albania. A Study Based on Oral History Interviews in the Region of Shkodra, with a Special Focus on the Period of Late Socialism (1976–1985)

Idrit Idrizi

85

Photography and Remembrance. Questioning the Visual Legacy of Communist Albania <i>Gilles de Rapper</i>	103
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Albania's Relations with the Soviet Union and Their Traces in Individual and Collective Memory <i>Brisejda Lala</i>	120
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Perspectives from the Region

Post-Socialist Nostalgia: What Is It and What To Do about It? <i>Daniela Koleva</i>	133
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Appendix

Conference Programme	146
Authors	150

Introduction

Memory and Portrayal of Communism in Albania in the Public and in the Private Sphere

A survey conducted by the OSCE on Albanians' knowledge and perceptions of the communist past awakened public reactions in December of 2016.¹ At the center of attention was the positive perception of the communist dictator on the part of almost half of those surveyed. This was explained mainly by Albanian society's not being sufficiently informed about the dictatorship and by the lack of de-communization, or it was treated as a nostalgia motivated simply by dissatisfaction with current conditions. Also, the project was accused of being politically biased.² The survey and reactions towards it reflect (aside from a tendency toward politicization) the beginning stages at which discussion and research on memory of communism in Albania find themselves. Studies with a similar level of representativeness, with which the results of the OSCE study (encompassing 995 subjects) could be compared, are lacking. Also, scholarly knowledge on the wide range of individual experiences of communism, on the basis of which memory during the post-communist period could be discussed, is rather limited. In general, a significant lack of awareness regarding the complexity of the phenomena of experience and memory of communism can be noticed. In the Albanian scholarship, debates in this field and on theoretical-methodological problems in researching communism and its remembrance are non-existent. Memories have either been ignored as a historical source or been treated as the most authentic sources. However, in recent years, especially foreign scholars and Albanian scholars educated outside the country, have shown an increasing interest in studying the memory of communism or at least in touching on it

1. For the study (published in Albanian and English), follow the link: <https://www.osce.org/sq/albania/286831>, accessed on 4.12.2018.

2. See, i.a.: Mejdini, Fatjona: Studimi për perceptimin e komunizmit zemëron viktimat e kohës: *Reporter.al*, 12.12.2016 (<https://www.reporter.al/studimi-per-perceptimin-e-komunizmit-zemer-on-viktimat-e-kohes/>, accessed on 4.12.2018) / Mejdini, Fatjona: Albania Survey Shocks Victims of Communist Regime: *Balkan Insight*, 12.12.2016 (<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albania-struggles-to-fight-the-root-of-communism-nostalgia-12-09-2016>, accessed on 4.12.2018); Pse u kthyen enveristet, *Mapo*, 10.12.2016, (<http://www.mapo.al/pse-u-kthyen-enveristet/>, accessed on 4.12.2018)

within the framework of projects with another main object of research.³

3. The most voluminous and methodologically and theoretically sound study on the memory of Albanian communism is Georgia Kretsi's monograph on political persecution in the region of Konispol and on the strategies of remembering it on the part of those persecuted: Kretsi, Georgia: *Verfolgung und Gedächtnis in Albanien. Eine Analyse postsozialistischer Erinnerungsstrategien*. Wiesbaden 2007. Shannon Woodcock's monograph uses oral history interviews mainly to reconstruct experiences during communism (Woodcock, Shannon: *Life Is War. Surviving Dictatorship in Communist Albania*. Bristol 2016). The same holds for Idris Idrizi's monograph (Idrizi, Idris: *Herrschaft und Alltag im albanischen Spätsozialismus (1976–1985)*. Berlin/Boston 2018.) The only volume up to today with articles dedicated to memory is: Godole, Jonila/ Danaj, Sonila (eds.): *Transformimi i medias dhe kujtesa kolektive në Shqipëri/ Media Transformation and Collective Memory in Albania*. Tiranë 2015. Of interest is also the issue of the German-Albanian Friendship Association's journal, "Albanische Hefte", dedicated to confronting the communist past in Albania: *Albanische Hefte* 3 (2015): Themenschwerpunkt: Vergangenheitsbewältigung. Fabian Kati's book on the collective memory of the anti-communist resistance in a number of regions of northern Albania contains extracts from interviews conducted, with an introductory overview of the project at the beginning, but without an analysis of the forms and strategies of memory (Kati, Fabian: *Formësimi i kujtesës kolektive. Ngjarjet në Dukagjin, Malësinë e Madhe dhe Postrribë, 1945–46*. Tiranë 2015). The same structure can be found in the book: Niegelhell, Anita/ Ponisch, Gabriele: *Wir sind immer im Feuer. Berichte ehemaliger politischer Gefangener im kommunistischen Albanien*. Wien, Köln, Weimar 2001. The Institute for the Studies of Communist Crimes and Consequences has published a large number of memoirs by former persecutees, among others, a series of volumes with interviews, "Zërat e Kujtesës" (follow the link: http://www.iskk.gov.al/?page_id=2708, accessed on 4.12.2018). These works constitute important sources, but they still remain to be analyzed in the future from the perspective of the way in which former persecutees remember communism in retrospect and how they deal today with their often traumatic experiences from the past. Among the works in the broad field of memory and confrontation with the communist past in Albania, or those that touch on various aspects of this topic, are worth mentioning: Amy, Lory E.: *Re-Membering in Transition: The Trans-national Stakes of Violence and Denial in Post-Communist Albania*, *History of Communism in Europe*, 1, (2010), 207–224; Austin, Robert C. / Ellison, Jonathan: *Post-Communist Transitional Justice in Albania*, *East European Politics and Societies* 22/2 (2008), 373–401; Duka, Valentina: *Reflections on the past in Albania in the 1990s*, in: Brunnbauer, Ulf (ed.), *(Re)writing History – Historiography in Southeast Europe after Socialism*. Münster 2004, 31–53; Elbasani, Arolda/ Lipinski, Artur: *Public Contestation and Politics of Transitional Justice: Poland and Albania Compared*, *EUI Working Papers* (02/2011); Glos, Walter/ Godole, Jonila: *Albanien: Aufarbeitung der kommunistischen Vergangenheit*. 2017 (http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_51049-1522-1-30.pdf?171215122516, accessed on 4.12.2018); Hemming, Andreas: *Justice of Another Kind. Laying Claims to the Past in Post-Dictatorial Albania*, *History of Communism in Europe*, 4, (2013) 44–64; Idrizi, Idris: *Zwischen politischer Instrumentalisierung und Verdrängung: Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Kommunismus in Öffentlichkeit, Geschichtspublizistik und Historiographie im postkommunistischen Albanien*, *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2014), 93–106; Ndoja, Davjola/ Woodcock, Shannon: *Postmemory and Women's Displacement in Socialist Albania: Historical Methodologies as Response*, in: Mitroiu, Simona (ed.): *Women's Narratives and the Postmemory of Displacement in Central and Eastern Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, 221–243; Pandejmonj (Papa), Enriketa: *Përfaqje të reja mbi historinë e Shqipërisë në tekstet historike gjatë tranzicionit / New Approaches on the History of Albania in historical textbooks during transition*, in: Schrapel, Thomas/ Pandejmonj, Enriketa / Pinari, Andi (eds.): *Thirrja për liri. Studime mbi totalitarizmin dhe tranzicionin në Shqipëri/ The Call for Freedom. Studies on Totalitarianism and Transition in Albania*. Tiranë 2016, 294–303/ 304–313; Pandejmonj (Papa), Enriketa: *Myth of a Leader: Enver Hoxha's Role during the Second World War in Contemporary Albanian History Textbooks*, in: Lichnofsky, Claudia; Pandejmonj, Enriketa; Stojanov, Darko (eds.): *Myths and Mythical Spaces. Conditions and Challenges for History Textbooks in Albania and South-Eastern Europe*. Göttingen, 2018, 137–150; Vullnetari, Julie/ King, Russell: 'Women here are like at the time of Enver [Hoxha] ...'. *Socialist and post-socialist gendered mobility in Albanian society*, in: Burrell,

Considering, on the one hand that the research is in its infancy, on the other hand, the awakening of interest in researching the memory of communism during recent years, the organizers of the international conference “Between Apathy and Nostalgia: Public and Private Recollections of Communism in Contemporary Albania” held in Tirana on 17–18 November 2017, conceptualized this as a platform for discussing, in an academic context, current studies and future perspectives. Furthermore, the participation of two scholars specifically from Bulgaria and Romania had the aim of contextualizing and comparing the Albanian case with other countries in the region.

This conceptualization of the conference is reflected in the structure and content of the volume. Its aim is not to exhaustively elaborate a specific issue, but to present the wide range of (often fairly specific) research topics and of current approaches in this notably wide field. For practical reasons the volume is divided into two main thematic groups, “Public depictions and discourses” and “Remembrance between the public and the private sphere”, though in a large proportion of the articles the various forms of memory are interwoven with each other.

Federico Boni, in a theoretically sound article, deals with the portrayal of Albanian communism in a number of works in recent years, analyzing these through the lens of the “ghostly turn.” The author connects the figure of “ghosts” with the repressed or forgotten cultural heritage of communism in Albanian scholarship and society. Based on the content and approach of the analyzed works, Boni places the emphasis on the “geography of ghosts”, which takes an interest in the traces of life in urban industrial ruins and the ghosts of abandonment. In the Albanian case, these are, for example, bunkers, the Metallurgic Factory of Elbasan, and the Pyramid building in Tirana. The article demonstrates the value of the “ghostly approach” toward studying public and private memory of the problematic communist past in Albania.

Kailey Rucker’s article also deals with the “ghosts” of the communist past that are present in the daily life of Albanians. The article is dedicated to the “Pyramid”, the perception of it, and the debates surrounding it.

Kathy/ Hörschelmann, Kathrin (eds.): *Mobilities in Socialist and Post-Socialist States. Societies on the Move*. Basingstoke 2014, 122–147; Vullnetari, Julie/ King, Russell: ‘Washing men’s feet’: Gender, care and migration in Albania during and after communism, *Gender, Place and Culture* 23 (2016), H.2, 198–215; Vullnetari, Julie/ King, Russell: From shortage economy to second economy. An historical ethnography of rural life in communist Albania, *Journal of Rural Studies* 44 (2016), 198–207; Woodcock, Shannon: The absence of Albanian jokes about socialism, or why some dictatorships are not funny, in: Hamilton, Caroline et al. (eds.): *The Politics and Aesthetics of Refusal*. Newcastle 2007, 51–66; Woodcock, Shannon: ‘Against a Wall’: Albania’s Women Political Prisoners’ Struggle to be Heard, *Cultural Studies Review* 2014, 20, 4093.

Inaugurated in October 1988 as a museum of the dictator Enver Hoxha and utilized after the fall of the system for different functions – from cultural center to dance club – this building was in danger of being demolished by the conservative government after 2010, which sparked protests. Combining the theoretical perspectives of the “politics of the dead body” of Katherine Verdery and of “destruction” of Anne Stoler, and based on interviews with participants in protests and on personal observations, the author analyzes the contemporary perception of this building. Rocker shows how memories and meanings also exist in a “pre-verbal stage” and reaches the conclusion that young protestors whom she interviewed associate the former memorial building of Enver Hoxha, beyond a dead body, with a ravaged space, but one that exhibits the condensed history of their city.

Two articles deal with the topic of museumization. Alsen Koka-lari contextualizes and analyzes two museums (exhibits) dedicated to the communist period, Bunk’Art 1 and Bunk’Art 2, opened respectively in November 2014 and November 2016, and the debates surrounding them. The article notes in them a new approach toward communism, which the author sees as imported or influenced by international trends. Among other things, Kokalari notes the tendency to integrate the communist period into the modern history of Albania, to aestheticize and commercialize this past, as well as to demonstrate that Albania has left it behind and that its identity is oriented completely towards Europe/the West. Konstantinos Giakoumis deals with the approach toward communist museology, and the processes of giving new meaning during the transition, through the example of the National History Museum’s activities. The analysis demonstrates a considerable degree of continuity with the once-dominant discourse of national-communism, cloaked with new meaning in the framework of the re-dimensionalization of matters of national identity and cleansed of purely communist content.

The last article of the first part of the volume, that of Afrim Krasniqi, is dedicated to a myth in collective memory that relates to the period of change in the political system, especially to two key events that led to the final collapse of the communist regime, the student protests of December 1990 and the toppling of Enver Hoxha’s statue in February 1991. Re-building and contextualizing the events on the one hand, and analyzing collective and institutional memory of them on the other, Krasniqi notes a significant discrepancy. While the protests were borne by only a small group, nearly isolated from the greater part of the population, which was indifferent, hesitant, or repudiating, the political change is depicted in

retrospect as a process attained with wide participation and consensus. Creating, among other things, the idea that Albanians were democrats in their formation, this myth has bewildering effects on Albanian society's confrontation with the communist past.

The second part of the volume opens with an article by Jonila Godole that typologizes the borrowed memory of young people who have not themselves lived through communism. Communicated memory, and specifically family memory, is at the center of the study, which demonstrates the central importance of stories in the family and the perception of communism on the part of young people. Secondly, information in the media and on the internet, as well as in films produced during communism, have an impact, whereas the role of schools in informing young people and building their awareness seems fairly weak. The narratives of memory, or more precisely the portrayal of communism and reflection on it by young people, are symptomatic of the process of confronting the past in post-communist Albania. On the one hand, uncompromising and emotional positions are dominant, and on the other hand there is unclarity and uncertainty. Insufficient or non-existent confrontation with the past constitutes a burden on Albanian society, just as family memory of communism or the actions of the family during communism constitute a burden on some of the young people included in the project of this article. Finally, it is worth emphasizing the interesting impact that technology has on reflections on the past. Whereas memories in the form of the essay had been written mainly in a personal and emotional style, audio-visual and digital works stood out for their higher level of reflection, analysis, and collection and curation of information.

The diversity in the ways of retrospectively remembering and interpreting communism, as well as uncertainties within narratives, aside from their sharp character on first glance, are evident in Idris Idrizi's article as well, which typologizes private memory of communism (in the region of Shkodër), focusing on memory of the late period. Strict conformity during communism – evident as well in Afrim Krasniqi's article in this volume – internalized and habituated by many contemporaries, especially by those born and socialized under communism, is, according to the author, one important reason why a large proportion of the interviewees remembered communism simply as normal. Referring as well to the debates on the character of memories and their value as a source, the article demonstrates the powerful influence of experiences on the narratives of private memory. In this way, communism is remembered very negatively mainly by contemporaries who, due to their biography, had suffered seri-

ous discrimination, or by young people at the time who, secretly watching foreign channels, had felt oppressed and wretched under the communist regime. Meanwhile, contemporaries who in various forms had benefitted from the opportunities offered by the political system especially associated this period with success, pride, and strength.

Gilles de Rapper deals with the impact that the visual heritage of the communist period has on memory – a very important topic if we keep in mind the direct relation between photography and memory, but one that is completely neglected by Albanian scholarship, as well as by public opinion. In this theoretically and methodologically sound article, the author first explains the memorialistic functions of the photograph and then presents various ways in which photographs of the communist period can be utilized in the Albanian case as historical objects produced in the past, but also at the same time as images of the past that are now present, continuously reinterpretable, just like memories.

Finally, Brisejda Lala, within the framework of her research on Albanian-Soviet relations, analyzes the traces that they have left on individual and collective memory. Although in retrospect the interviewees denounce the foreign policy of the communist regime, it is worth emphasizing their perspective at the time along the same lines as propaganda. The stories and arguments for their sympathy at the time for Stalin, their sadness at his death or their hatred for the Soviet leadership after the rupture of relations show – along the same lines as the findings of Krasniqi and Idrizi's articles – the especially narrow horizon of information and reflection under the conditions of the dictatorship.

In the third section of this volume, Daniela Koleva, the keynote speaker at the conference, explicates the various dimensions of nostalgia for communism in Eastern Europe. Koleva's theses about the character of nostalgia and the ways of approaching it are worthy of consideration by the Albanian scholarship, in order that this frequently encountered but very rarely scientifically analyzed phenomenon can be taken seriously as an important object of research, for the purpose of achieving a better understanding of (post-)socialist Albanian society and the challenges with which it has been confronted and continues to be confronted.

The articles deal mainly with specific topics, some of which have been noticed in the framework of study projects with another main object of research. Studies that have a broader empirical basis and a deeper basis in the fairly complex phenomena of the wide field of memory of communism will shed light on the representativeness of the findings presented here. In any case, this volume, by presenting the works of an international academic conference dedicated specifically to the memory

of Albanian communism, aims to offer a contribution, however small, to this field and to serve as an impulse for increasing the interest of the Albanian scholarship and Albanian society in researching and discussing the memory of the past under dictatorship.

Finally, the editors would like to cordially thank all those who have contributed to this book: the authors of the articles for their outstanding collaboration; the other participants of the conference who did not manage to submit their work, but who sparked valuable impulses with their presentations and discussions (see the appendix at the end of the volume); Tienmu Ma, Ledia Fazli, Elona Baçi and Kailey Rocker for their dedicated translating and editing; the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which supports the IDMC's activities; and Matilda Karçanaj for her tireless work during the academic conference and in the process of publishing the conference's results, which you hold in your hands.

Jonila Godole and Idrir Idrizi

Public Depictions and Discourses

Specters of Communism

Albanian Post-Socialist Studies and the Return of the Communist Repressed

Federico Boni

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Introduction

A specter is haunting Albania – the specter of communism. The paper aims to investigate a particular kind of recollection of communism in contemporary Albania, that is, communism as a research topic in contemporary Albanian Studies. Despite the fact that the international scholarship on communist and post-communist studies is quite widespread, in Albanian social sciences the issue is a relatively new one. Albanian scholars seem to turn the political taboo of communism into a scientific one, and research on the past seems to produce value-judgment and moralizing works which contribute to the creation of new taboos functional to the new regimes of truth in Albanian society. However, in the recent years Albanian cultural studies and (post-)socialist studies have produced a “new generation” of works focused on a critical self-reflexivity.

The paper aims to analyze this new academic wave focused on the Albanian communist past through the lens of the “spectral turn”, which sees specters and haunting as compelling analytical and methodological tools for the humanities, cultural studies and social sciences. Central to the idiom of the “spectral turn” are a series of concepts that have become increasingly important in contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship, such as trauma, the uncanny, mourning, and memory. Specters, in this case, are part of a symptomatology of repression and remembrance, and the figure of the ghost stands for the specters of the repressed or forgotten cultural legacies of communism in Albanian academy and society. Analyzed through this “spectral turn”, Albanian post-socialist and cultural studies provide a compelling argument for a continued interest in the noisy ghosts of Albanian culture, and invite national and international scholarship to a séance with Albania’s unfinished communist past.

1. The “Spectral Turn” in Cultural Studies

In the last years humanities and social sciences have undergone what Roger Luckhurst (2002) has called a “spectral turn”, that is, an increasing academic interest in ghosts and haunting. Of course, there are differences in the ways with which ghosts can be engaged. Literary and cultural studies tend to see them as a sign or an index of something else, be it the fears or the anxieties of culture, where the specter both represents the something else and is rejected and repressed when it threatens society’s stability. Other authors have followed Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* (1994), who formulates a general “hauntology” (*hauntologie*), in contrast to the traditional “ontology”, where the specter and haunting represent the experience of an absent presence, that of the “other” as a ghost (provided that the death of the subject is assumed), a *revenant* that always comes back. According to Derrida we must learn not to mourn this death, as that would be the silencing of the specters of what is no longer and not yet. Rather, hauntology is an attempt to make productive sense of the absent, mysterious and terrifying aspects of contemporary life, not repressing them, but coming to terms with them. At the end, what ghosts remind us is that there is a fundamental ineffability to human experience most discernable in the moment of trauma.

All the complexities of the haunting are tied together in Avery F. Gordon’s work on *Ghostly Matters*, an exploration in *Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997). Gordon argues that sociologists should not be *ghost-busters* but *ghost-whisperers*. Since the past always haunts the present, sociology must imaginatively come to terms with those ghostly apparitions, as they register “the arm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or in the present” (ibid: xvi). To study social phenomena, we must confront the ghostly aspects of them, because ghosts are social figures:

“ghostly matters are part of social life. If we want to study social life well, and if in addition we want to contribute, in however small a measure, to changing it, we must learn how to identify haunting and reckon with ghosts, must learn how to make contact with what is without doubt often painful, difficult, and unsettling” (ibid.: 23).

Following Derrida and Gordon, we shall argue that haunting is something that involves uncertainty, heterogeneity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy. It uses the figure of the ghost to pursue that which haunts like a ghost and, by way of this haunting, demands justice, or at least a response.

More importantly for our topic, the conceptual metaphor of spectrality is particularly embedded within the discourse of memory, recovery and remembrance that delineate the multidisciplinary project of trauma studies. As Cathy Caruth argues, to be traumatized is to be “possessed by an image or event” located in the past (1995, 5). To be “possessed” also describes the condition of being haunted. When we think of ghost stories, it is the haunting of the present by the past that emerges as the most insistent narrative. Post-traumatic memory is not simply a “symptom of the unconscious”, but – most importantly – a “symptom of history” as well. Trauma is engaged in the quest for an answer, an evanescent truth. Such is the case with the ghosts that arrive from the past, seeking to establish an ethical dialogue with the present. Ghosts, in this case, are part of a symptomatology of trauma, as they become both the objects of and the metaphors for a wounded historical experience.

Moreover, the notion of spectrality may facilitate the understanding of not only historical injustices and their commemoration in personal and/or collective memory, but also of situations of injustice and disempowerment arising in and from a present characterized by a diffuse process of globalization – and, as in the case of Albania, a diffuse process of neo-liberal capitalism.

One of the most interesting issues of the spectral turn is that of *spectro-geographies* (Maddern and Adey 2008). Some geographers suggest that a careful attunement to the ghostly, spectral and the absent can be a particularly effective way of dealing with a number of issues central to contemporary geographical thought. *Spectro-geography* is used as a theoretical and methodological tool for research on traces of life woven through urban industrial ruins and the ghosts of dereliction, the uncanny resonance of subaltern postcolonial and post-communist histories. In this way, spectrality is understood through the ghostly rendering of space, objects and material artifacts, with the specific focus on the very substance and the concreteness of the urban and rural space which brings forth the ghosts and haunting of the repressed (though not forgotten) past.

In this vein, Tim Edensor (2005) seeks the “ghosts of place” in the industrial ruins – derelict foundries, workshops, and factories – marginal sites which continue to litter the increasingly postindustrial cities of the West. Our contemporary spaces continue to be haunted by the neglected, the disposed of, and the repressed, most clearly in marginal sites where ghostly memories cannot be entirely exorcised. In this case, ghosts are understood to be summoned up through the planning and contestation of sites of memory, through the reconsideration of forgotten events or plac-

es. Here the immateriality of ghosts meets the materiality of the spaces we live in. Through processes of decay and non-human intervention, objects in ruins gradually transform their character and lose their discreteness. They become charged with alternative aesthetic properties. They impose their materiality upon the sensory experience of visitors. They conjure up the forgotten ghosts of those who had been consigned to the past upon the closure of the factory but continue to haunt the premises. In these ways, ruined matter offers ways for interacting otherwise with the material world.

In this fashion, Justin Armstrong (2010) reflects on the possibility of engaging in a kind of ethnography of absence, an anthropology of people, places and things that have been removed, deleted, and abandoned to the flows of time and space. Here, the author suggests a mode of ethnographic inquiry that performs an archaeology of the emptied present and of the vacant spaces of culture. By this, anthropology gives credence to specters as social figures and assigns to ethnography the task of following ghosts out of a concern for the past and the present. Following this directions, Lars Meier et al. (2012) have conducted an ethnography which connects haunted industrial workshops and emotions of loss, with an understanding of class-related senses of place within the memories of metalworkers. Workers describe how, when they visit their former workplace, they have to confront the haunting of the past. And it is through these haunting experiences that their class identity takes a new but often painful existence.

2. A “Spectral Turn” in Albanian Post-Socialist Studies?

So far, we have seen the most interesting outcomes of the “spectral turn” in different academic fields, and in cultural studies in particular. Some of the authors of the new generation of Albanian post-communist studies seem to take this spectral approach. In particular, they have taken to *spectro-geography* which connects the experience of haunting to specific places, where the elusiveness of spaces and places, in its connection with the lingering presences and absences of memory and history (both personal and collective), are reconceived by way of the spectral.

One of the most interesting “specters” of Albanian landscape is that of the bunkers, which form a sort of uncanny and ghostly skeleton all around the country. A study by Elian Stefa and Gyler Myditi (2013) deals with this specter that haunts the everyday lives of Albanians. Large and small bunkers that are located in tourist areas are often brightly painted or

have been converted into beach bars or restaurants. The act of painting or reusing the bunkers makes a novelty out of these Cold War structures and reduces the level of fear that they once held. Still, this specter haunts the memory of Albanians in very unpredictable ways. The two authors show that what was built to communicate to the outside world and to the Albanian people the rejection of any direct form of interaction (and a strong control from the State) is a revenant that haunts the Albanian landscape as a space converted to reflection on the bunker fantasy and on bunkerization as such. Many of the bunkers have become ruined constructions returned to nature, which are very similar to the ruins studied by Tim Edensor (2005) in their connections with memory and the past – a gothic and spectral presence which blurs the borders between past and present. On the one hand, the bunkers provide an opportunity for the recollection and the understanding of a traumatic period of recent Albanian history. On the other hand, they constitute a unique opportunity not only for global branding but for infrastructural development. Reconciliation with the physical traces of this history is one path toward emotional and psychological reconciliation with the trauma itself, obtained by a novel appropriation of a landscape of trauma (see also Galaty et al. 2009).

Emily Glass (2016) proposes a study on the “concrete memories” connected to the cultural production in a communist Albanian factory, based on a “spectral ethnography” of a former concrete factory (Ndërmarrja e Ndërtimit, Gjirokastra – the Construction Enterprise in the town of Gjirokastra) where numerous concrete items were produced to aid in the modernization of the country. She visited the factory with some of its former workers to talk about the time they had spent working there. Glass follows a spectral approach when she argues that the Gjirokastra factory is in a partially ruinous state which, according to Edensor (2005, 317), places it in an ambiguous position: decaying but still existing and freely accessible for use in the construction of meanings, stories and practices. She argues that the Gjirokastra factory has a sense of Bell’s “Ghosts of Place” (1997) about its environs. Like many of Albania’s relics of Communism and abandoned buildings there is a broad ghostly sense of a felt *presence* that possesses and gives a sense of social aliveness to the space (ibid., 815).

Glass argues that buildings are linked to personal and collective memories in the psyche through rituals of daily functional use or by the presence of a structure in the landscape. Meanings become attached to their fabric and memories can be invoked through the mere sight of a building; collective memories of architecture can thus develop through

individual exchanges between people over time or by continued interaction with the built environment. These can be contested, changeable or homogenized, but, ultimately, they create a shared attitude towards representations of the past. To that end, being in the factory space with the interviewees in the stale heat and dusty quiet facilitated awareness of the spatial and temporal sense of place within the discussions, far beyond what would have been conveyed from the comfort of an air-conditioned cafe. Indeed, there was a lingering sense of a poignant echo, a conjuring of Bell's work when he emphasized that ghosts of place "are never dead, although they may be of the dead, as well as of the living" (1997, 816).

A similar approach is that of Olsi Lelaj and Nebi Bardhoshi (2016). Though they don't refer explicitly to the *spectro-geography* as Glass, they did use what we could call a "spectral ethnography" very recently. The two anthropologists joined an initiative sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and inaugurated by the Prime Minister – a contemporary art project labeled "Informal Mind" that took place between 11 and 15 October 2014 in the former Metallurgical complex of Elbasan. Their task was that of producing for the occasion an anthropological narrative for this industrial complex built during communism. Instead of producing a *metanarrative*, Lelaj and Bardhoshi opted to present and understand the former metallurgical complex from the perspective of the people who worked there during communism. They spent days talking and intensively interviewing four workers that had been working there during the 1960's, since the beginning of the construction of *Kombinat*. As the authors argue, the reflections of the workers "are part of a wider puzzle, that portrays the need to 'justly' acknowledge the past. The idea of 'justly' representing the past mirrors on the specific and delicate relationship between politics, history, ethics, morality and the everyday in post-socialist Albania" (ibid.: 5).

What is most interesting here, however, is that the place of the *Kombinat* is considered not only in its actual representation but also as a former experience. In the workers' memories, the spectral threshold between presence and absence is created by the relationship between what they encounter today and what they remember from their former experiences at the place of work, before the transformation occurred. The formerly present structures, which are now absent, come alive in their memories as hauntings, which are, in effect, present absences. The haunting appears in conjunction with the workers visiting their former workplace and it involuntarily creeps into their biographic interviews. Everyday geographies, places and identities are not without a past, and it is through the haunting experienced by workers that this past and the social violence that may have happened can be seen and remembered.

Ilir Parangoni's research on Albanian industrial ruins (Parangoni 2015), though based on an archaeological perspective, is implicitly embedded with the discourse of haunting, spectrality and cultural repressed past. Parangoni recognizes that Albanian industrial heritage is particular to Albania and its communities, since it is something that was created and used by Albanians themselves. The very remembrance of the *construction* of textile and metallurgical combines and plants is an intangible heritage of communist Albania as important as the tangible heritage of the ruins and the reconditioned places.

If Lelaj & Bardhoshi's and Parangoni's approach is not explicitly that of the "spectral turn", then Raino Isto analyses the politics of memory in post-socialist Albania with an explicitly spectral approach. In a recent article (2016) Isto examines the Tirana Independence Monument, first inaugurated in November 2012 on the 100th anniversary of Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire. The monument, designed by Visar Obrija and Kai Roman Kiklas, swiftly fell into disrepair until it was recently renovated in November 2015. Isto analyzes the monument's function in terms of its doubled existence as a sign of perpetual natality (the possibility of the rebirth of national consciousness) and as a ruin with a spectral pseudo-presence (as an object that continually reminds us of the disjunctures that divorce the present from its historicity). He argues that the monument's gradual ruination between 2012 and 2015 can be read as a particular manifestation of the history of the image in late capitalist society. Isto argues that "the monument's ruination and rebirth are emblematic of a set of difficulties related to the imaging of the relationship between Albania's past and its present, and in particular of effectively representing the historicity of Albania's current sociopolitical condition, dominated by neoliberalism" (ibid.: 9-10).

The spectral quality of this ruined and re-born monument contrasts with another sort of ruined and ghostly "monument", the Pyramid in Tirana, one of the most iconic buildings from the communist period present in the capital city. Recently, Francesco Iacono and Klejd Këllici (2016) undertook a survey to understand how this monument is currently perceived by a sample of the citizens from Tirana. When asked about the plan to destroy the Pyramid, the majority of respondents strongly disagreed on this. The authors argue that, although it is one of the most recognizable landmarks in Tirana, the Pyramid is fairly recent, having been completed in 1988. This means that older generations didn't have the time to develop a "special relationship" with the monument. Besides, its use as a museum of Enver Hoxha lasted only four years and its use

after the fall of communism stretched over a much longer time. For this reasons the building is associated with Tirana as a city, rather than with either communism or specifically with Enver Hoxha.

Conclusions

The few examples presented in this paper aim to show the effectiveness of a “spectral” approach to the issue of public and private memory in post-communist Albania. The authors and the studies presented here focus on the ghost as related to the realm of history and memory, and on the question of the heuristic potential of haunting metaphors in the broad and interdisciplinary field of post-socialist studies. The significant issues covered are the figure of a ghost as a medium of troubled cultural memory, the role of haunting as a metaphor to describe the processes of cultural transmission of problematic past, and, more generally, the theory of memory as haunting.

Within such works, ghosts manifest not as terrifying revenants, but as welcome, if disquieting spurs to consciousness and calls for political and social action. Moreover, the dead here appear not as the protagonists of a repressed story told by others, but as *agentive* revenants.

Through explorations of the concept of haunting in the works presented, we can investigate social, political and cultural contexts in which ghosts are produced and encountered, summoned and exorcised. At the same time, we can argue for the potential of haunting as an experiential modality, affective recognition, way of knowing, and a type of political and critical consciousness within the national and international scholarship in Albanian post-communist studies.

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Ruins, Bodies, and Pyramids: Exploring Communist Ruins and Memory Politics in Albania

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Introduction

“They had always been privy to the main point, the first principle, of the pyramids’ raison d’être, except that it had lain in their minds in a pre-verbal, indeed in an unthinking state. The papyri of the archives had only draped it in words and in meaning. Insofar as a shadow can be draped ...” (Kadare 2013, 3)

The words above are from Ismail Kadare’s *The Pyramid* first published as a novel in 1991–1992.¹ While the title refers to the pyramid of the Pharaoh Cheops and serves as an allegory for totalitarian regimes, the novel also, in an uncanny way, speaks to the monumental pyramid-shaped building, colloquially known as the Pyramid and located along the Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard in Tirana, Albania, today. It speaks to the building’s multiple, ephemeral, and vibrant histories – from its birth in 1988 as a museum space commemorating the former dictator Enver Hoxha to its most recent ones as an International Cultural Center, dance club, exhibition space, concert venue, set of offices, and an abandoned, pad-locked construction zone. All of its manifold histories located on the cusp of and following Albania’s post-communist transformation² came into question in 2010 when the Albanian prime minister announced plans to replace the building with a new parliament.

In response, a number of protests organized by civil society groups³, political opponents, and architecture students arose with the support of many young adults, public figures, and even members of the Democratic

1. The first part of Ismail Kadare’s novel *Piramida* was written during the same period of time that the Pyramid building in Tirana functioned as the Enver Hoxha Museum, from 1988–1990. Kadare’s book was later published in 1991–1992. This is in parallel with the building’s first closure following the student protests in Albania in 1991.

2. Despite the fact that communism – the ideal, the objective that state socialist societies were working towards – never materialized before the collapse of Eastern European socialism, the terms “communism” and “post-communism” are most often used to discuss the country’s past, in addition to other terms like ‘socialism’ or ‘dictatorship.’ Henceforth, in this paper I refer to the period of time from 1944 to 1991/2 as ‘communism’ and the period following as ‘post-communism.’

3. I acknowledge that ‘civil society’ is a contested term. In this paper I agree with Amy and Gjermeni’s (2011) use of the term Albanian civil society as referring largely to NGOs.

Party (Klosi and Lame 2011). Tirana was embroiled in a debate about the Pyramid's fate that continued through 2011 via news, media, and protest. While those "for" its destruction argued that members of Parliament needed an updated office and meeting chamber, one of their most memorable statements attacked the building's very origin, accusing the Pyramid of housing the ghost and memory of the former dictator.⁴ However, many of the participating, young architecture students, born either at the time of its construction in the late 1980s or at the start of Albania's post-communist period in the early 1990s, countered this last claim by asserting that the building's meaning was not reducible to Enver Hoxha's presence – dead or alive. Many drew from their own personal memories of the Pyramid as a multi-purpose space in the 1990s and early 2000s.

In this paper, I approach the politics of memory surrounding this building and the country's former communist dictatorship in contemporary Albania via the "Protect the Pyramid Movement" and its multifold (dis)uses during the country's post-communist period. As the movement was key to unearthing a discussion about the Pyramid's meaning and placement in Tirana, I focus on the Pyramid's history as told through stories of young adult protesters who actively participated in the 2011 movement.⁵ In my analysis, I also draw on my own observations of how people, from tourists to those from Tirana, use the Pyramid on a daily basis today, and as told by the decaying flesh of the Pyramid itself.

Because both a dead body – that of Enver Hoxha – and a building facing accelerated decline are the focal points of this research, I combine two different theoretical perspectives to examine the politics of post-communist memory in Albania. I draw from both the anthropologist Katherine Verdery's dead-body politics and the geographer Anne Stoler's ruination. In this paper, I demonstrate that Verdery's framework of dead-body politics, which follows the politically charged movements of corpses and their statue counterparts, remains a useful analytical tool alongside that of Stoler's politically-charged concept of ruination to examine contemporary memory politics in post-communist Albania.

Like Cheop's pyramid in Ismail Kadare's novel, Tirana's Pyramid is also "draped in words and meanings" through archival documents and

4. "Nuk mund ta ruajmë vendin ku fle fantazma e diktatorit...": Vinca, Agim. 2011. "Piramida dhe sindroma e prishjes." *Gazeta Shqip*, July 16: <http://www.gazetashqip.com/opinion/a53b6058f1c-3c2b222b29c03fe1cf1d7.html>.

5. For more information about multi-generational perceptions of the Tirana Pyramid, please see Iacono and Këlliçi 2015. The authors conducted a survey about the public perceptions of the Pyramid and heritage from the dictatorship. In their analysis, the authors used incorporated memory to explain the positive feelings that many Tirana citizens (especially those currently in their 50s and 60s) attributed towards the Pyramid.

contemporary media representation; however, a lot of its stories, meanings, and memories exist in a “pre-verbal state” and are harbored in the minds and bodies of those who give the building life (Kadare 2013, 3). As Kadare’s work about Cheop’s pyramid provides a strong parallel to the life of Tirana’s own Pyramid and to the ways that the memory, history, and materiality of objects are continually (re)defined, I include some of the author’s quotes throughout this paper. In doing so, I highlight some of Kadare’s own thoughts about regimes, epochal shifts, and the powerful memories of objects.

Between Dead Bodies and Ruins – A Theoretical Context

“People said pyramids but it was not hard to guess that they meant Pharaohs, and they eventually gave free rein to their thoughts by alluding directly to a sovereign. Obviously not to the living sovereign, Mykerinos, but to a dead one.” (Kadare 2013, 105)

Katherine Verdery’s theoretical framework of dead-body politics combined with Anne Stoler’s concept of ruination are both useful for understanding the debates that took place at the “Protect the Pyramid Movement”. According to Verdery (1999), dead bodies can be political actors that inspire things like social stability, political transition, or public debate. For example, following Lenin’s death in 1924, the Soviet Union developed experimental embalming techniques to preserve his corpse, which is still on display today in Moscow. At the time, the Soviet Politburo used Lenin’s well-preserved dead body as a symbol for socialism and its immortality (Yurchak 2015). And since the 1990s, the continued preservation and display of Lenin’s body in Red Square has been a topic of debate.

Importantly, within Verdery’s framework, the category of the dead body can be expanded to include statues, especially the socialist realist statues of the former regime (Verdery 1999). Alongside the movement and commemoration of famous corpses like Lenin, we also have the excessive creation, in some case, and destruction, in others, of statues meant to represent deceased figures. A relevant example of this is the “parade of corpses (and their statues)” associated with the downfall of socialism across Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, early 1990s (Verdery 1999, 3). In Hungary, the government corralled the remaining social realist statues in an outdoor park located outside of Budapest (Nadkarni 2003; Light and Young 2011). And, the 1991 protesters in Tirana famously toppled

the Enver Hoxha statue once located in the city center of – a moment that many of my interlocuters define as the official end of the Albanian communist period.

In addition to statues, I also contend that large, monumental spaces – such as the Pyramid – can be included within this expanded definition of the dead body, especially as its original function was intimately tied to the former dictator – much like his mass-produced statues found all over Albania. While it was never a mausoleum for Enver Hoxha's corpse as some sources falsely claim, it did, in a sense, initially serve as a mausoleum for his memory and the edited works of the Albanian Party of Labor. This was one of the arguments pointed out by some members "for" its destruction in 2010–11 when they referenced Enver Hoxha's ghost in the building. As Kadare writes, "People said pyramids but it was not hard to guess that they meant Pharaohs, and they eventually gave free rein to their thoughts by alluding directly to a sovereign. Obviously not to the living sovereign, Mykerinos, but to a dead one." (Kadare 2013, 105).

"In truth, the Pyramid was aging, but at an infinitesimal pace." (Kadare 2013, 110)

Traditionally, the ruin is an architectural object that has begun to decay through natural means, such as weathering or lack of human intervention. According to Georg Simmel (1965), the ruin represents the domination of nature over human spirit and creation. More recently, social theorists such as Anne Stoler have called for a different understanding of the term ruin. In her conceptualization, the ruin is a decayed space that "condenses history" and "weighs on the future" (Stoler 2013, 9). In other words, it contains multiple, sometimes contested, histories. And the process of making and identifying ruins is a politically-charged one.

Importantly, ruins are products of what Anne Stoler calls ruination (2013). The process of ruination "is a political project that lays waste to certain people, relations, and things" (Stoler 2013, 11). In this instance, nature is not slowly reclaiming a building; instead, ruins may be the act of willful destruction, according to Rao (2013, 290). And, like the dead body, ruins can be appropriated or neglected as strategic tools for pursuing social stability, political change, and debate (Stoler 2013). The Tirana Pyramid, while not a ruin in the traditional sense, is a decayed space in the heart of the city, touched by nearly thirty years of the country's history.

Falling apart and between officially recognized uses, the Tirana Pyr-

amid, whether it has been acknowledged as a ruin by those in positions of authority or not, has become for many a ruined space – a space caught between use and disuse, public and private, as well as life and death. In its lifespan, the Pyramid has served as a museum commemorating Enver Hoxha's life, as the International Center of Culture (later renamed after Pjetër Arbënor⁶), the Mumja dance club, the offices of Top Channel, the skeleton of a National Theatre, a storage space, and an event venue, among other purposes. Through its numerous official lives and interventions, the Pyramid has fallen into decline – with its original marble exterior peeled off, many of its windows boarded up and shattered, and the smell of dust and construction filling its interior.

While the pyramid in Kadare's book “was aging... at an infinitesimal pace...,” the Tirana Pyramid is not (Kadare 2013, 110). On the contrary, in the last 29 years, it has aged at an accelerated rate – helped by its use and disuse. Between its original design to hold the image and life stories of the former dictator and its rapid decline during the 2000s, the Pyramid has become a material force, between a dead body and a ruin, for social comradery, change, and debate.

What Does the Pyramid Represent Today?

“A man's shadow was the first thing to leave its master, and his name was the last: in fact, the latter was the most faithful of all his possessions.” (Kadare 2013, 88)

How do the Pyramid protesters understand and represent the Pyramid in contemporary Albania and what place does the building continue to have in the post-communist Tirana cityscape? Is it still recognized as an iteration or symbol of the former dictator Enver Hoxha as some members of parliament that supported “its removal and replacement” had asserted in 2010?

All of my interlocutors that had participated in the “Protect the Pyramid” protests had been in their early-to-mid-20s in 2010–11. And they all had a particularly nuanced understanding of the Pyramid – its history and architecture. While they did not associate the Pyramid with Enver Hoxha or the former Enver Hoxha museum, in all cases, my interlocutors still acknowledged their awareness of the building's original function.⁷

6. Since 2006, the Pyramid has been formally renamed the Pjetër Arbënor International Center of Culture – after another important deceased Albanian figure. Despite the effort to rename the building, colloquially the term “Piramida” has stuck.

7. The finding of young people being more likely to associate the Pyramid building with the city

And some, even without prompt, acknowledged that this building had been a part of the former dictator's cult. However, they were clear to contextualize this notion in light of the building's 29-year history, drawing attention to how briefly the Pyramid had served as a museum. The following excerpt is from a young architect from southeastern Albania that I will call Erjon:

*"The building is associated with communists ... actually with the cult of the dictator. But to me, I don't see it related with Enver Hoxha because it had been a museum for him just for a year ... And if you went to a high school and asked a student, no one would say that this was the museum of Enver Hoxha ..."*⁸

Another interviewee that I will call Ina, a young architect from northern Albania, told me that she couldn't even remember when she learned about the Pyramid's earliest years as a museum. However, knowing this hadn't changed her feelings. The Pyramid "never gave (her) that feeling."⁹ In this instance, Ismail Kadare's quote written above is rather telling. The shadow of Enver Hoxha, at least through the perspective of these Pyramid protestors, was not as apparent at the site of the Pyramid. However, his name and its association with the communist period were two things that remained – legible, but not felt.

"Progressively Egypt would identify itself with it, and it would become identified with Egypt" (Kadare 2013, 7)

More strongly, my interlocutors thought of the Pyramid as a public space, an abandoned building, and a unique architectural feature of Tirana – that, despite its monumental size, was of a more human scale and ideal for its location along the wide the Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard. When I had first met Erjon, he spoke at length about the Pyramid's revolutionary architecture – its status as the first building in Albania without vertical walls and its hidden height compared to its surrounding neighbors. He explained to me that while the Pyramid was taller than the Prime Ministry, because of its sloping walls and its placement off of

than with Enver Hoxha is in line with the findings of Iacono and Këlliçi's quantitative survey on the perception of the Pyramid. Young adults were more likely to consider the Pyramid as a part of the affective landscape of the city, "as something that had more or less always been there" (2015, 107). However, as I demonstrate in this paper, the young adults that I spoke with were highly aware of the building's background and linkage to the past regime.

8. Erjon. Interview by author. Personal interview. November 14, 2017.

9. Ina. Interview by author. Personal interview. November 11, 2017.

the boulevard, it was difficult to feel its size. In a way, he mused that it was perfectly proportioned for its placement along the Boulevard. While monumental, Erjon felt that the Pyramid had a more human scale compared to its counterpart vertical buildings, making it more relatable.

Furthermore, my interlocutors verbalized that the Pyramid, while only one building, was divided into two parts: the offices of Top Channel, located in the backhand-side, and the semi-used, semi-abandoned space in the front that has suffered more extensively from visible processes of ruination.¹⁰ While half of the building appears abandoned and closed, the other is actively used on a daily basis. As Ina pointed out and something that I noticed during the summer of 2017 when I was participant-observing the Pyramid on a regular basis, the front-half is still actively used too, beyond the occasional activity hosted inside the space. Children and young adults continue to climb up its gentle sloping arms and a variety of people from tourists to those from Tirana continue to use the space as a public park during the day. While my interlocutors no longer frequented the Pyramid regularly, they continued to walk through its plaza and occasionally went to publicized events hosted inside the Pyramid – sometimes out of pure curiosity ... to see how the building was holding up.

“They had always been privy to the main point, the first principle, of the pyramids’ raison d’être, except that it had lain in their minds in a pre-verbal, indeed in an unthinking state. The papyri of the archives had only draped it in words and in meaning. Insofar as a shadow can be draped ...”
(Kadare 2013, 3)

When I asked Ina why she and her friends had decided to participate in the protest, she told me that at the time, it had been difficult to verbalize the importance of the building’s memory. She felt that it was important, but didn’t feel that she had the background to share those thoughts at the time. She continued, “We needed to talk about communism. This (protest) was valuable to talk about (that).”¹¹ Beyond that, this series of protests had also been the first time that Ina had ever participated in a social movement, the first time she had felt a part of a larger group concerned with something that belonged to everyone. She felt the importance of this debate and the opportunity to co-claim public space.

Ina reminds us that some perceptions of the Pyramid and motivations to join the “Protect the Pyramid” movement were “pre-verbal”, or

10. The front-side faces *Bulevardi Dëshmorët e Kombit* and the back-side faces *Rruga Papa Gjon Pali II*.

11. Ina. Interview by author. Personal Interview. Tirana, November 13, 2017.

something that could not be expressed entirely in words, something felt (Kadare 2013, 3). When my interlocutors spoke about the Pyramid, they often spoke about “feeling” the space. It was a place that was connected to Enver Hoxha but didn’t feel like his ... It was a place that didn’t feel as monumental as it actually was ...

The Pyramid: A Museum of its Own

Many of my young interlocutors, represented in this paper by Erjon and Ina, who had been born in the late 1980s and early 1990s acknowledged the Tirana Pyramid’s linkage to Enver Hoxha historically but repeatedly insisted that they had entirely different feelings towards the Pyramid, stemming from its placement in Tirana, its exterior and interior design, and their personal memories of the site. During our conversations, the architects that I spoke with often lingered the most on the Pyramid’s degraded state – lamenting its drastic material transformation since the early 2000s. From a museum, to a cultural center, to a dance club, to an unfinished theatre, to a semi-used, semi-abandoned space (and the offices of Top Channel) today, it is the Pyramid’s very own process of ruination instigated by the fall of communism and accelerated by the never-fully-realized national theatre project, that has provoked young Albanians like my interlocutors to understand the Pyramid as more than a dead body but as a ruined space of the city.

As a ruined space, it not only symbolically condenses history (Stoler 2013, 9) but actually exhibits that condensed history (see Figure 1). If you look closely at the “Home” graffiti on the western face of the Pyramid, you can just make out the lettering of the Mumja dance club still affixed to the concrete, a very different type of dead body that once resided inside the Pyramid in the early 2000s. Climbing up the rickety wooden stairs to the apex of the Pyramid’s interior today, you can still see the star-shaped skylight that had lit Enver Hoxha’s museum in 1988. Peeking behind the freshly painted trees on the northeast side of the Pyramid, you can still see layers of spray-paint doodles and graffiti, added within the last few years. Immediately upon entering the space, your vision of the space is cut short by the walls of the incomplete theatre.



Figure 1: The Pyramid's ruination through time – Above you can make out a condensed history of the Pyramid (displayed in no particular order) as the museum, Top Channel's offices, graffiti shortly after the protest, painting the Pyramid gray in 2015, and the remnants of the Mumja dance club entrance with "Home" graffiti.

Enver Hoxha's shadow is one of many histories that has touched the Pyramid in the past three decades. And each history has physically left its mark, contributing to its decay. While Enver Hoxha's dead body continues to persist as one of the more prominent histories of the site, my young interlocutors latched onto the Pyramid's form as well as its most recent historical uses with which they were more familiar. While no longer a museum for the memory of the dictator, the Pyramid presents a small piece of Tirana's post-communist history – at least, as told through the vibrant scars of a ruin, returning not to nature but to the city.

"The Pyramid was also the country's long-term memory... One day, with time, everything else would fade away ..." (Kadare 2013, 8)

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Bunk'Art Project – A Glimpse into the Communist Past in Albania

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After the fall of the Berlin Wall, each of the former communist states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) took its own path toward the changes and political transformation that followed, building a new identity based on liberal, pluralist, and democratic ideals, both for domestic and foreign use simultaneously. Meanwhile, in the case of some of these states, the way in which they addressed their communist past, it seems, still remains a preoccupying matter, whereas others have managed to achieve considerable reconciliation with their past (Light 2000).

Focusing on the case of Albania, and on the continuous process of post-communist memory-formation, it must be emphasized that, despite the growing number of publications and increased public debate surrounding this issue, the process of understanding, remembering, and interpreting the past seems still not to have reached an advanced stage.

Building on the master's thesis I defended under the supervision of Professor Andromache Gazi at the University of Panteion of Athens in 2015, entitled "Difficult Memory in the Case of Albania"¹, this presentation focuses on the case of the so-called "Bunk'Art Project" in an effort to analyze new trends in the treatment of the remembrance of communism in museums. Beyond just offering an analysis, I will aim to contextualize the broader debate over collective Albanian memory and its political dimension.

Memories and Museums

According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory "always adapts to social surroundings," since individual memory can be understood only through the memory of the different social groups to which the individ-

1. Methodologically, the research is based on open interviews with representatives of state institutions and civil society who play a decisive role in participating in the decisionmaking process regarding activities related to the memory of the communist period in Albania. My main aim is to collect and enrich data on a topic on which there does not exist a sufficient number of publications, in order to understand the dynamic processes of collective memory formation, the attitudes and trends formed in Albania during the past 27 years.

ual belongs, such as the family, religious communities, political classes, or the nation (2013: 19). Only in such a context are individuals in a position to “rebuild a [lasting] body of memory” and to refer to events of the past (Halbwachs 2013: 22).

Despite the continuous presence of the social dimension, cultural theorists hold that shared memories of the past are not produced accidentally by social groups, but rather are the result of cultural mediation, mainly textualization and visualization (Tamm 2013: 461). Jan Assmann, one of the main exponents of the cultural approach (together with his spouse Aleida), in an effort to differentiate himself from Halbwachs’ so-called “communicative memory,” holds that “the concept of cultural memory includes a body of repeated texts, images, and rituals, which are specific to every society and every era, the ‘cultivation’ of which serves to stabilize and convey society’s self-image” (Assmann 1995: 132).

Following such a perspective, it could be argued that memory can be seen as “an active process of understanding through time” (Olick and Levy 1997: 922), in which individuals as well as social groups take part in its formation, but without adhering completely to the official narrative. The contradictory and contested nature of memory often provokes debate, especially when it has to do with monuments that aim to honor collective memory sometimes by “forgetting” some specific elements of the past (Young 2000). Thus, the attitude that in the end prevails can come as a result of frequent clashes, accompanied not uncommonly by political implications.

Today, museums, as one of the most remarkable institutions of memory, must manage complexity and multiplicity, and confront the current social and cultural milieu, all while maintaining an equilibrium between individual and collective memory. In the process of attempting to recast their role and function in society according to the needs of the present, museums have altered their museological discourse during the past two decades. So-called “museums of memory,” which were developed as a result of a number of political, geographical, and cultural changes in the past three decades, can now be characterized not only as academic and institutional sites, but also as memory spaces, illustrating the change from a dominant discourse perceived in the past, into a broader range of stories about the past (Simine 2012: 15-16).

Within this context, objects displayed in museums are not seen simply as “witnesses to the past,” but can also be seen as a means of narrating and explaining the past, since they illustrate the chosen narratives of those museums. Thus, what is truly important about an exhibition is the narra-

tive that it chooses for presenting a given topic, in this way encouraging visitors to develop personal forms of engagement with the memory displayed in the museum (Simine 2012: 18).

Usually, museums of memory have to do with difficult themes, which often comprise feelings of guilt and/or trauma. As such, they are deeply rooted in cross-cultural debates and disputes, politically loaded with the ethics and aesthetics of experience of the past. In addition, since the main challenge is “to speak about that which is considered indescribable and to remember that which is unimaginable,” they must be extremely careful in the way in which they manage the necessary equilibrium between heroic tales and tales of martyrdom (Simine 2012: 18–20).

Examples from Central and Eastern European countries, and the efforts they have undertaken to recast and re-evaluate their communist past, bring to light the complex, contradictory, and highly contested terrain of memory, in which a range of actors dealing with memory participate, each of whom has a different level of motivation and inclusion in it. In some cases, for example in the museum of memories in the People’s House (Casa Poporului) in Bucharest, an effort can be noticed to create distance from the past, emphasizing the open and democratic spirit of the present, or, as in the case of the Statue Park of Budapest, an effort to re-contextualize the statues presented in the terrain by distancing them from the contexts that produced them.

In other cases – such as, for example, the House of Horrors, also in Budapest – oral and visual testimonies mainly serve to highlight the darkness and oppression of past regimes, in an effort to bring to light injustices or negative experiences during the periods of oppression. As Macdonald states, the aspects that are highlighted or deemphasized in each case have to do with current needs, since they can shape future ways of understanding specific aspects of the past (2010: 19).

The Case of Albania

In Albania, the fall of the communist regime in 1991 marked a general disavowal of every aspect of the previous political system. The disintegration of institutions and the massive exodus of the population at that time made the state and its citizens turn their attention almost exclusively to fitting the country into the “new” reality, whereas the events that followed in 1997 further destabilized the situation. In these circumstances, the period of the communist regime seemed not to be of interest to

anybody, at least in the case of most of the population. At the same time there could be noticed an effort to erase almost every physical trace of the communist regime, the most symbolic gesture being the toppling of the statue of Enver Hoxha in the center of Tirana in 1991.

The main priority of that period was the economic, political, and social transformation of the country, in an effort to leave behind that which happened in the recent past, and to rebuild a new Albania for its citizens. The chief objectives during the long process of transition that followed included the creation of the market economy and democracy, together with the reestablishment of civil society.

In this context, talking about communism was considered taboo, whereas almost every public discussion was reduced to the political polarization between the two main post-communist parties, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party (Hemming 2013; Lelaj 2012). With regard to cultural productivity, it must be emphasized that almost every initiative in connection with the field of art and culture was mainly concentrated on the harmonization of the country with European institutions and the promotion of cultural heritage, mainly highlighting distant historical periods, as an effort to further boost citizens' morale (Council of Europe 2008: 53–55); this phenomenon is noticeable more broadly in other Central and European countries as well (Cf. Vukov 2012: 123 – 124).

Thus, during the first two decades after the 1990s, aside from insecurity surrounding the way in which communist history should be confronted, the need to remember such a recent past was not a priority for the Albanian state, especially considering the need to give necessary priority, in regard to existing funds, to the protection of cultural heritage (Harrison 2013).

Under these conditions, the strategy of “decommunization”, for example, removing from public buildings and spaces every symbol that might refer to the previous regime (Young and Kaczmarek 2008, cited by Iacono and Këlliçi 2015: 100), which can be noticed in the majority of former communist states after the 1990s, seems to have been the only public initiative for the treatment of this matter on the part of the state.

Aside from some individual or collective initiatives that will not be covered in this paper, the first effort to articulate a public demand to deal with the communist past at the national level crystallized in 2010 with the case of the Pyramid, sparking powerful debates about the legitimacy of the type of heritage that it represented.

Three years later, in 2013, immediately after the parliamentary elections that marked a change of government from the Democratic to the

Socialist Party, the Ministry of Culture for the first time publicly announced that the management of “communist heritage” would now take its place as one of the chief priorities of its cultural policy.

The case of Bunk’Art1, which will be discussed below, constitutes a part of the so-called Bunk’Art Project, inaugurated by the left-wing Prime Minister in 2014.

Bunk’Art Project²

Located on the outskirts of the capital city, Bunk’Art symbolizes the isolation of Communist Albania and the confrontation of the communist bloc with the West during the Cold War. At its essence, it is the muze-umization of a nuclear bunker built in the 1970s to accommodate Enver Hoxha and the Albanian political elite of the time, in case of a chemical or nuclear attack.



Fig. 1. View of the museum's main entrance and logo

Even though it is usually referred to as a museum, Bunk’Art seems not, up to now, to have obtained this legal status; it still continues to be treated as a military unit managed by the Ministry of Defense.

What seems interesting is the fact that, while the project first became known as an initiative of the Ministry of Culture, during the ceremony for its reopening in 2016 the Mayor of Tirana, accompanied by the Minister of Economic Development, Tourism, Trade, and Entrepreneurship,

2. The main webpage of Bunk’Art can be found at: <http://bunkart.al/1/home> (accessed on 09.09.2017).

participated as representative authorities, giving a new perspective not only to the project in question but more generally to the post-communist reality in Albania.



Fig. 2. Views from museum exhibits: “Bunkerization Program 1975 – 1983”

Pausing at Bunk’Art’s museumization process, it can be noticed that its architecture has been preserved, whereas the interior spaces have been reconceptualized to accommodate artistic, museum, and historical exhibits.

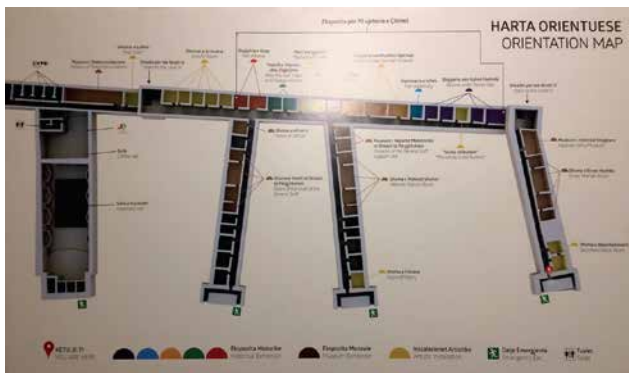


Fig. 3. Orientation map, on which the museum’s structure can also be seen

More concretely, with regard to the artistic exhibits, mainly video-art, audio, light, and image installations are seen to be accommodated, aiming to create “a historical and emotional journey” for visitors, as was also stated by the Prime Minister himself³ during his speech inaugurating the project. With regard to the “museum exhibits,” these refer to the museumization of a number of the personal rooms of the communist leader-

3. Prime Minister Rama’s full remarks during the ceremony inaugurating the project can be accessed at the official website of the Office of the Prime Minister, at the following address: <https://kryeministria.al/al/newsroom/fjalime/bunk-art-nje-thesar-i-kujteses-kolektive1416939379> (accessed on 22.10.2017).

ship, including here Enver Hoxha's room and that of the Prime Minister at the time, Mehmet Shehu. Also included here are special sections such as "The Socialist House," "Sports Activities," "Education in Albania," etc.



Fig. 4. Views from the museum exhibit: "Enver Hoxha's Room"

Despite efforts to preserve untouched that which was found in the bunker, "authentic" objects that were used during the communist period that, in addition, do not belong to the concrete context, give a more decorative character to the rooms and created spaces, something that, it would seem, has a disorienting effect on the museum's visitors. A number of those interviewed also stated that such a strategy of presentation awakens feelings of nostalgia via the personal memories that it recalls to visitors, especially for those who used these objects in their daily lives during that time.



Fig. 5. Views of the museum exhibit: "Socialist House"

With regard to "historical exhibits," they are divided into different zones according to color and they refer to a number of particular periods of modern Albanian history, beginning with "Italian fascism" (1939 – 1943) and "The German Invasion" (1943–1944) up until the post-war period, under the title of "Hope and Disappointment" (1945–1947) and "Albania after Liberation" (1945 – 1990).



Fig. 6. Screenshot from the official website of Bunk'Art, in which the areas of the Historical Exhibition can be seen

Relating to the above, it is worth commenting on two specific points: First, the breadth of the chronological range covered by Bunk'Art, but also the highlighting of Albania's resistance during the German occupation, and in this manner the integration of the country into the Western anti-Nazi axis force, are all interesting. But what seems to hold special importance in this case is the fact that it is perhaps the first time that an official state authority has chosen to present the communist period as a part of a broader historical context, beyond the strict temporal boundaries between 1944 and 1990. Something like this can be interpreted as an effort to interpret the matter historically by highlighting different policies that were implemented by the previous regime, with long-term socio-political and economic effects in Albanian society.

Secondly, on closer inspection, the title "Bunk'Art – 70 years after Liberation," which was used during the inauguration of the project, beyond the anniversary it highlights, gives one a highly positive impression, perhaps not of the regime itself, but of Albania and its national history considered as a whole. This positive image, so closely connected to the history of 19th century museums, and in particular historical and national museums, arouses a feeling of optimism, while at the same time giving an impression of victory and pride in what was achieved.

Meanwhile, the very architectonic setting of the bunker, as a labyrinth with long and dark tunnels, together with mysterious stories that promise to reveal, provokes a curiosity that promises visitors an "emotional experience" (as is also described by the Lonely Planet). Thus, within just the first year of its opening, Bunk'Art welcomed around 30,000–60,000 visitors, whereas frequent publications in the national and international media, as well as on social media in support of it, seem to have

contributed even more to its fame, thereby giving a new dimension to memory and its management.



Fig. 7. View of the museum corridor

In 2016, the project continued with the inauguration of Bunk'Art2 in the center of Tirana. Adopting the same museological approach already mentioned above, Bunk'Art2 is dedicated to the victims of communist terror through reconstructing the history of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (from 1912 until 1991) and the history of the political police, the State Security.



Fig. 8. View of the main entrance of Bunk'Art2

Of special interest here is the conflict that was created when the managing authority decided that an artificial bunker would be placed at the main entrance of the Bunk'Art2 museum, thus symbolizing the visitors' entrance into the "dark" and "oppressive" regime of Enver Hoxha. This led to pushback from the opposition party, which accused the Socialist Party in power of lacking sensitivity toward those that had suffered under the old regime, as well as of having a nostalgic attitude toward

that regime. Thus, in 2015, members and supporters of the Democratic Party held a protest during which they caused damage to the museum's entrance, as well as to the buildings of the ministries located around it.



Fig. 9. View of the artificial bunker after the opposition protest

In a way, this collision of interests is indicative of a broader perspective, showing that remembrance of the past in Albania still remains contested, and includes a battle for power among different groups, political ideas, and the feelings that they perpetuate. Meanwhile, every effort to engage in critical discussion about memory of the past is often monopolized by similar polemics, thereby perpetuating to a considerable degree the political polarization of the past.

Conclusions

Despite the increased interest – which has recently become evident – relating to the way in which memory of the past ought to be handled, it remains a sensitive and controversial issue. This fact is demonstrated mainly by the contradictions observed in almost every effort to confront the past.

Meanwhile, what the discussion about Bunk'Art and similar projects shows is that, with the passage of time, a gradual movement can be noticed from the so-called “darkness of the communist regime” (seen mainly in examples such as the Museum of National History, which is not covered in this presentation) to a comprehensive perspective on the past, in which the communist period is presented as an integral part of Albania's modern history. Meanwhile, by focusing on the presentation

strategy of the museum under discussion, as was stated by the majority of those interviewed, the project revealed a tendency to aestheticize the past, evoking emotions that paint a not-so-clear picture of the past.

But this aestheticization in the remembrance of the past has made this type of museum appear hybrid, combining not only commercial aims but also the political need to get to know the communist past, beyond the perceptions of Albanian society itself. Furthermore, the perspective of tourism, which seems often to be adopted by such initiatives, shows that Albania, like other Central and Eastern European countries, seeks clearly to show that it has left behind its communist past and is reorganizing itself in accordance with the political and economic values of Western Europe (Hall 1995b; Light 2001).

Thus, aside from a need to confront the past, such a position can also be seen as an impulse imported from the outside, as well as a need on the part of Albania to reformulate and reconstruct its cultural memory in accordance with international trends, in order to fulfill the needs of the present and to adjust to its new identity, oriented toward Europe.

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Pragmatist Politics on Memory and Oblivion

Post-Communist Attitudes towards Communist Museology in Albania

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This paper surveys the operations of the National History Museum (NHM) during the period of late communism and its aftermath, and investigates how exhibitional concepts were developed after communism in Albania. In this way, it spells out the processes of giving new meaning in the transition from an exhibitional concept with an ideological epicenter to one that places objects at its center, as well as how mediated discourse on communist exhibitional concepts changed with the passage of time.

In this paper, we shall first analyze nationalist and communist myths embedded in the museological concept of the NHM. The originator and organizer of the design and implementation of the project to construct the NHM was Aleks Buda, a figure who was, without a doubt, emblematic for Albanian historiography. Intertwined with the political and ideological postulates of the communist regime, Aleks Buda and the scientific commission around him were obligated to construct and support, via the project of the museum, nationalist myths within the communist framework, as well as communist myths. With the term “myth,” we mean symbolic narrative displays with a “holy” significance for its creators, bearers, and consumers; such narratives constitute the embodiment of beliefs, concepts, and the ways of reasoning of worldviews.¹ On this definition, the term “myth” is void from any kind of claim to truth or falsity.² After defining the concept of “myth” as it is used here, I will first discuss myths of the communist period that the NHM supported; in the second

1. Eliade, Mircea. *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1959; cf. Abizadeh, Arash. “Historical Truth, National Myths, and Liberal Democracy”. *Journal of Political Philosophy* 12/3 (2004): 291–313.

2. On the concept of political myth, see Bottici, Chiara. *A Philosophy of Political Myth*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Aleksić, Tatjana. “Introduction: Mythistorical Genres of the Nation.” In *Mythistory and Narratives of the Nation in the Balkans*. Edited by Tatjana Aleksić, 1–11. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007; Cruz, Laura and Fijhoff, Willem. “Introduction: Myth in History, History in Myth.” In *Myth in History, History in Myth*. Edited by Laura Cruz and Willem Frijhoff, 1–15. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009. Regarding myths in the former world of socialist realism, see Perica, Vjekoslav and Gavrilović, Dardo, eds. *Political Myths in the Former Yugoslavia and Successor States. A Shared Narrative*, translated by Dana Todorović. Dordrecht 2011: Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation and Republic of Letters.

part, I will trace the way in which these myths were transformed in the post-communist period, thereby bringing out post-communist attitudes with regard to communist concepts of museology.

Inaugurated on 28.10.1981, the NHM was conceptualized structurally and was erected as the embodiment of nationalist and communist myths. In the museum's structural aspect, such nationalist myths (in their communist variant) can be noticed, such as ethnocentrism and the disregard of minorities; perennialism in the process of the birth of the nation (ethnogenesis); a linear, almost "eschatological" treatment of historical processes as phases of "national" development; ethnic purity inside the "national" territory; victimization; and the eternal national struggle. Communist myths manifested in the work of Aleks Buda include the Marxist-Leninist tradition, enriched, as it was thought, by the lessons of Enver Hoxha; slave-owning systems and the class struggle in feudal society; an aspect of national culture as a development of "popular" culture chiefly developed in rural, non-urban centers and in opposition to that of the classes in power; and an anti-religious stance. In the second part of the paper, I will show how the NHM adapted to the demands of the new post-socialist, multi-party era. As I hope to show, while many communist approaches to museology were abandoned or removed completely, some others were preserved after undergoing a process of gaining new meaning within the framework of ethnocentric continuity and national narratives and discourses.

National and Communist Myths

In interdisciplinary studies of nationalism, it is today widely accepted that efforts at conformity, and therefore nation-states themselves as political entities where the territory bears a special value and symbolism, are connected mainly with the 19th century. Whereas some authors, such as the historian Eric Hobsbawm, connect this directly to the French Revolution, others point to 1848 as an important year that marked the beginning of the disintegration of the European empires, while this process culminated only after the First World War, with the disintegration of Austria-Hungary in 1918 and the Ottoman Empire in 1923. For well-known authors on nationalism, such as E. Gellner, nation-formation was connected directly with industrial currents and demographic movements from rural to urban areas, which created the conditions for more rational economic units (new nation-states), in contrast to those on a large scale

(empires and kingdoms) or the hundreds of principalities and medieval fiefdoms.³ On the other hand, for a constructivist, such as B. Anderson, it was the process of *print capitalism* that resulted in the creation of an imagined community,⁴ which brought together the “cold” and rational construction of the state with the “heat” transmitted by new national feelings. Naturally, these theories would explain Albanian nationalist currents, and the birth of the modern national identity that followed, as processes of the currents of industrialization and modernity that also brought the differentiation between “high or low” culture, as Gellner and others would tell us. But in fact, modernity and industrialization came very late to Albania, only after about a decade and a half after the declaration of independence, and it was consolidated only after Hoxha’s communists came into power.

Miroslav Hroch has delineated three chronological phases in the creation of a nation.⁵ Phase A is connected with the foundations of a national identity, which creates a cultural nation that later serves as a source of support for the political nation. Phase B foresees the rise of “political agitators” who attempt to convince their fellow citizens of the need for a political project. Phase C, which is connected to mass primary education of the population, occurs when the majority of the population is persuaded regarding this new nation; “in this phase, a full social movement is born, and the movement is divided into conservative clergy, liberals, and democrats, where each current has its own program.”⁶ If we adopt Hroch’s approach as a point of departure for analyzing the case of Albania, given that it is related to Albanians’ efforts at nation-formation and the re-creation of a national identity parallel to the experience of countries in Central Europe that Hroch treats in his analysis, we notice that the cultural “awakening” of Albanians began later than that of its Balkan neighbors, only around the middle of the 19th century, when N. Veqilharxhi invented his alphabet. Meanwhile, we can say that the patriotic “agitation” began with Sami Frasheri’s classic 1899 text “*Albania, what it has been, what it is, and what it shall become*” and continued with various groups that were included in the constant guerrilla war with the Ottoman Empire or local leaders who organized repeated revolts. From the League of Prizren in 1878 until the rebellions of 1911, we have demands for autonomy that then culminated in the declaration of independence and sovereignty in 1912. Phase C, if we adhere to Hroch’s typology, began with the Elbasan

3. Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.

4. Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 2006.

5. Hroch, Miroslav. *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

6. *Ibid.*

Normal School in 1909 and the alphabet agreed upon at the Congress of Manastir in 1908. Furthermore, the first schoolbooks, or books of a more general character, such as those of Ndoc Nikaj, Konstandin Çekrezi, etc., began to be published.

Modern nations were not born from nothing, and naturally, ethnicities are those that constitute the primer and the foundation on which they are born and are developed, as ethno-symbolists such as Armstrong⁷ or Hutchinson⁸ contend. According to A. Smith, they are a collective memory and a sharing of a collective destination, cultural and linguistic connections, collective myths and traditions, etc.⁹ These viewpoints are generally opposed by modernists such as Gellner, by institutionalists such as Brubaker, and by constructivists such as Anderson,¹⁰ for whom the creation of modern nation-states has little to no connection with the ethnicities that have substituted them, and are processes tightly connected with the era of the Industrial Revolution and the era of modernism. Historiographies of the Balkans, where Albania is of course no exception, have supported the first viewpoint and have interpreted it in broadly linear form, whereby the nation has resisted without being disturbed by outside pressure or invasions. This has resulted in the birth of a number of myths, from which we can highlight that of ethnogenesis, which is mentioned starting from the era of the Awakening and continues until today. Ethnocentrism is encountered as a myth in all Balkan countries, including Greece.¹¹

These myths have had an influence on the way in which the “official” history of the Albanian people has been written by the Academy of Sciences, as well as by history books in the schools. On the other hand, they are also not infrequently used to legitimate the skewed positions of opposing parties, as shown by Schöpflin and Hosking.¹² Other important myths widely encountered in the Balkans, including Albania, are that of “victimization” or that of ancient and glorious times, when we were

7. Armstrong, John Alexander. *Nations before Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.

8. Hutchinson, John. *Modern Nationalism*. London: Fontana Press.

9. Smith, Anthony D. *Nationalism and Modernism*. London: Routledge, 1998; Hroch, Miroslav. *In the National Interest. Demands and Goals of European National Movements of the Nineteenth Century: A Comparative Perspective*. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University, 2000.

10. See note 4.

11. *Ibid.*; Xohellis, Panagiotis; Kapsalis, Achileas; Andreou, Andreas; Ismyrliadou, Adela; Loukidou Despoina; Bonidis Kyriakos; Chatzisavvidis Sophronis. “Η Εικόνα του «Άλλου» στα Σχολικά Βιβλία Ιστορίας των Βαλκανικών Χωρών.” Νέ Η Εικόνα του «Άλλου» στα Σχολικά Βιβλία των Βαλκανικών Χωρών. Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου, Θεσσαλονίκη, 16-18 Οκτωβρίου 1998. Edited by Achileas Kapsalis, Kyriakos Bonidis and Athina Sipitanou, 67-99. Athens: Typothito, 2000.

12. Hosking, Geoffrey A. and Schöpflin, George. *Myths and Nationhood*, 28-34. London: Routledge, 1997.

great and strong.¹³ Serbs, for example, have erected their entire modern historiography upon a victimization myth in which the battle of Kosovo Polje, where Prince Lazar fell, is defined in this way, in which the hero lost an earthly battle to win the heavenly kingdom. Meanwhile, with the Albanians, this kind of myth can be noticed in the repeated emphasis on the fact that Albania has continuously been attacked by the predatory appetites of its neighbors in order to slice up its territory during various historical periods, whereas the myth of the glorious times in the past harks back to the era of Skanderbeg, just as the Greeks view the Byzantine Empire and the Serbs the kingdom of Stefan Dušan.

The communist period also brought modernism in its train, as well as a greater attention to the humanistic and social sciences, including them alongside the traditional sciences, but viewed from a new perspective, such as history, geography, etc., and also new branches such as ethnography and folklore, the study of popular culture and archeology. Various authors, such as J. Mace, a well-known student of nationalism, or Albanian intellectual Fatos Lubonja etc.,¹⁴ have called the communist period in Albania that of national-communism, distinct from the typical communism of the countries of the East, which had an internationalist bent. In fact, since 1957, a distinguished student of Marxism, Milovan Djilas, wrote in his book *New Class*: “No form of communism . . . can exist other than in a national form. In order to resist, it is necessary to be nationalized.”¹⁵ But Ceausescu’s Romania and especially Hoxha’s Albania took to an extreme the synthesis of the communist ideology with that of nation-formation, producing a national-communism that clearly differed, not only from communist federations such as the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Tito’s Yugoslavia, but also from unitary Eastern states such as Poland and Hungary. This became especially clear after the rupture of relations with the Chinese, during the isolation and autocracy of the ’80s and beyond, in which “walking along unknown paths”¹⁶ went hand in hand with the premordial discovery of the reinforcement of the myths of ethnogenesis and heroic history, based on the myth of sacrifice and the return to the glorious times of the past, and culminating in the communist regime itself as the embodiment of the defense and renewal of the nation. Seen in this

13. See van Evera, Stephen. “Hypotheses on Nationalism and War.” *International Security* 18/4 (1994): 5–39.

14. Mace, J., *Communism and the dilemmas of national liberation: national communism in Soviet Ukraine, 1918–1933* (1983). Lubonja, F. “Shqiptarët dhe nacional-komunizmi.” *Panorama*, Dec. 19, 2012.

15. Djilas, Milovan. *The New Class*. London: Thames and Hudson, (1957): 176–177.

16. Hoxha, Enver. “Lufta e Partisë për thellimin e Revolucionit Socialist në të gjitha fushat përmes Luftës së ashpër Klasore (1971–1976)” *Kongresi VI i PPSH. Detyrat për thellimin e Revolucionit Socialist në të gjitha fushat*, Chapter VIII. Tiranë (1971).

prism is also the need for the construction and a method of organization for the NHM, in which the aforementioned myths are clearly reflected.

National and Communist Myths in the Conceptual Structure of the National History Museum

The organizing principle of the exhibitional structure of the NHM is ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism refers to the tendency to see the world and history from an exclusively and excessively national perspective, which often results in (pre-)judging other cultures on the basis of the standards and values of a national culture.¹⁷ The term was coined at the beginning of the 20th century in connection with the differentiation between the in-group and the out-group, in order to describe the perspective according to which one's in-group becomes the center of the world and its meanings, while everything else is measured and evaluated according to that group.¹⁸ The entire project of the founding of the National History Museum, since 1974, was conceptualized "both for the ideological importance of [its] content and for the treatment of this museum itself as an historical monument of national glory" to reflect "the historical continuity of the glory of the Albanian people."¹⁹ From this perspective, the National History Museum (NHM) of Tirana does not differ in character from other national museums.²⁰ The structure of the pavilions of the NHM, both before and after the 1990s, remains ethnocentric (*see Table 1*)²¹.

17. Reynolds, Vernon; Falger, Vincent S.E.; Vine, Ian, eds. *The Sociobiology of Ethnocentrism*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press 1987.

18. Sumner, William G. *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals*. New York: Ginn, 1906.

19. "Mbi Projektin e Muzeut..." *A.Q.Sh.* F. 490 (KM), D. 455 (1977), pp. 45–8; cf. Adhami, Stijlan. *Muzeologjia Shqiptare*, 51–3. Tirana: Gervis, 2001.

20. For a rich bibliography on this topic, see McIntyre, Darryl I. and Wehner, Kirsten, eds. *National Museums: Negotiating Histories*. Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2001.

21. "A.Q.Sh. F. 490, D. 455/1 (v. 1977), pp. 290–306.

According to the NHM Platform of 1977	Today
1. Antiquity	1. Antiquity
2. Albanian Ethnogenesis (7 th -12 th centuries)	2. Middle Ages
3. Formation of Albanian Feudal States (12 th -14 th centuries)	
4. Wars of the Albanian People against the Ottoman Invasion: Skanderbeg	
5. Wars of the Albanian People against the Ottoman Yoke (16 th -early 19 th centuries)	3. Icons
6. National Awakening	4. National Awakening
7. Founding of the Communist Party of Albania	5. Albanian Independence
8. Antifascist War of National Liberation	6. Antifascist War of National Liberation
9. Construction of the foundations of socialism	7. Pavilion on Communist Persecution
10. War for the full construction of a socialist society	8. Pavilion on Mother Theresa

Table 1: Comparison of NHM pavilions before 1990 with those of today.

The denial or disregard of the presence of ethnic or cultural minorities on the national territory has been one of the strategies of consolidation of the nation-state and the homogenization of its population. This “imagined” homogeneity was also reflected in the project idea for the establishment of the NHM, as is reflected in the many communications directed to the Committee of Ministers in Tirana on 15.10.1977. In it, the analysis of changes in Albanian economy and society during the 19th century would be achieved “via documents and objects of territorial, linguistic, and cultural unity,” whereas in the presentation of these changes, one matter that would be treated was also “ethnic Albanian lands together with the administrative divisions (vilayet, sanjak, kaza) and their populations in the 19th century,” for the presentation of which in “the initial plan, ethnographic material is presented illustrating the cultural homogeneity of the Albanian people.”²² In this way, even though there are a fair number of exhibits from Albania in languages other than Albanian (e.g. the inscription from Gziqi, or inscriptions of exhibits relating to St. Jovan Vladimir), this linguistic diversity is neither emphasized nor explained (*Figure 1*).

22. “Projekt-Ideja e Muzeut Historik Kombëtar.” *A.Q.Sh.* F. 490 (KM), D. 455 (1977), p. 128.

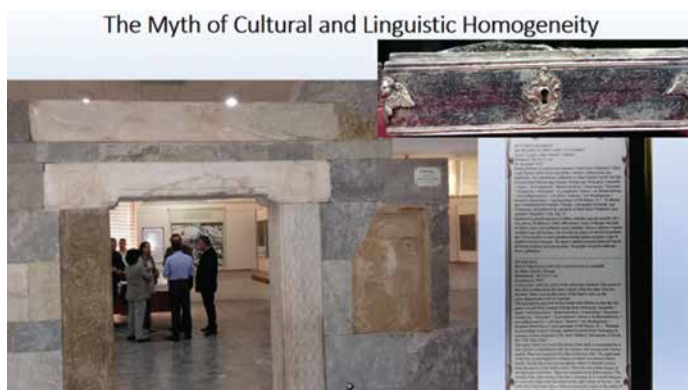


Figure 1: NHM. Multilingual inscriptions in connection with the monastery and relic of St. Jovan Vladimir, without comment from the perspective of linguistic diversity.

Perennialism in the process of the birth of the nation (ethnogenesis) implies that the process of creating the nation was linear and lasted for a number of centuries. On the NHM platform, one of the central lines of content on the theme of the formation of the Albanian nationality in the 8th–12th centuries is “the process of ethnogenesis of Albanians on the basis of direct Illyrian–Albanian continuity, which resulted in the formation of the Albanian nationality as a territorial-linguistic and cultural community.”²³ In this prism, all historical processes are treated “in linear fashion,” in an “eschatological” way, in which every process has a role in the process of national development. The linear, eschatological treatment of history was also demanded by Enver Hoxha himself.²⁴ Whereas museological allusions relating to perennialism are highlighted in the pavilion on the Middle Ages, the NHM webpage only hints at linear continuity without mentioning it explicitly (Figure 2).

23. “Platforma e MHK.” *A. Q. Sh.* F. 490 (KM), D. 455/1 (1977), p. 295.

24. “Letër e Enver Hoxhës drejtuar Rrahman Hankut me të cilën jep mendimet e tij mbi planet e para të Muzeut duke shprehur edhe pakënaqësinë e tij mbi projektin fillestar” *A. Q. Sh.* F. 490 (KM), D. 455 (1977), pp. 96–100.

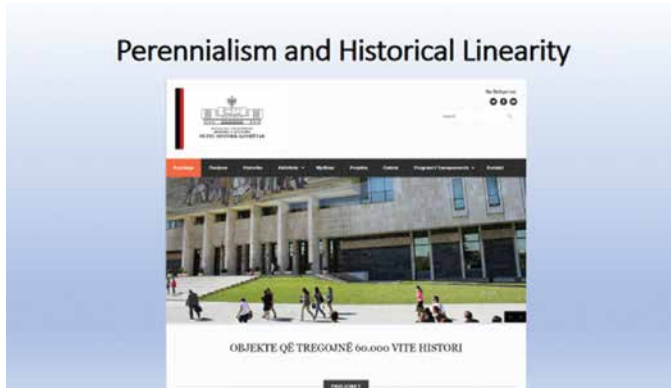


Figure 2: Perennialism and historic linearity, stated indirectly, in implied fashion.

Source: <http://www.mhk.gov.al/>, accessed on 30 January 2018.

The myth of ethnic purity on the “national” territory had the aim of homogenization and purification of the population from every “foreign” element, by eliminating the concerns and dilemmas of national or cultural minorities on the same territory. Aleks Buda²⁵ argues zealously against allusions to the partial Romanization of several regions of Albania. According to him, the arguments “speak against the thesis that the ancient autochthonous population in Southern Illyria supposedly disappeared as a result of Romanization.” According to him, the presence of Slavs also left almost no traces: “Research conducted in our country has shown that the archeological evidence for the presence of a Slavic culture arriving with the influx during the 6th–7th centuries is negligible, isolated, and temporally limited,” and he attributes this to an Albanian cultural supremacy vis-à-vis the Slavs, since “the newcomers were numerically and culturally inferior as opposed to the ancient autochthonous population . . .”²⁶ As a result, monuments to cultural diversity and cultural multilingualism in Albanian-speaking regions of the Western Balkans, such as the trilingual inscription on the monastery of St John Vladimir (*Figure 1*), commissioned in three languages by an Albanian prince, Charles Thopia, received no comment, neither in the communist period nor later. As a matter of fact, the inscription on the door is instead used as a point of departure to comment on the importance of the monastery in the development of Albanian language and culture.²⁷

25. *Shkrime*, 114.

26. *Ibid.*, 114–5.

27. Cf. <http://www.mhk.gov.al/?portfolio=pavijoni-i-mesjetes>, accessed on 30 January 2018.

The myth of ethnic purity was preserved thanks to permanent, popular resistance against enemies. Thus, we are dealing with one myth that feeds into another myth, that of permanent victimization. The Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman periods were represented in the NHM through maps, objects, and other visual appendices around which the myth of permanent resistance against foreign influxes or invasion was constructed (Figure 3; comp. Table 1). The presence of a series of objects that did not confirm the myth, e.g. the wide private use of the language of the invaders throughout tombs (e.g. the inscription from Gziqi), was explained away by reference to class differentiation and social processes.²⁸ Such exhibitions, which cast doubt on the myth of permanent victimization, are generally left without comments reconciling their presence (e.g. the language of the “invaders”) with the dominant myth.



Figure 3: View of the Pavilion “Wars of the Albanian People Against the Ottoman Invasion: Skanderbeg.”

The myths of the slave-owning systems and the myths of class struggle, as expected, also appear frequently in the project plans of the NHM, since national culture was developed only by “the popular masses.”²⁹ In the NHM project, as evidenced even today, slave-owning systems and class struggle are presented in an almost linear historical continuity. Thus, the period of economic and cultural prosperity of Southern Illyria, during the 6th century until the 2nd century B.C.E., “represents the history of the Illyrians and the highest level of their sociopolitical development: slave-owning. The formation of antagonistic classes set the groundwork for the formation of the independent Illyrian states, which

28. F. 490, D. 455 (v. 1977), pp. 113.

29. Ibid., 112.

joined in the advanced civilization of the world of antiquity.”³⁰ In the period of economic-cultural development of the country (1st–4th century C.E.), “Illyrian lands recognized the further deepening of slave-owning exploitation”; thus, in the selection of exhibits, “an effort is necessary to distinguish popular culture from that of the ruling slave-owner classes, both Roman and native.”³¹ The fall of the Roman Empire is attributed to “. . . the deepening of the crisis of the slave-owning order,” which, according to the plan of the NHM, leads to the “revival and strengthening of the native element in the Illyrian provinces, in political-military life, or in cultural life, the strengthening of native traditions, which demonstrates the staying power of the Illyrian element in our lands and constitutes a contribution to the demolition of the slave-owning order,” but also “the overturning, in revolutionary fashion, of the old slave-owning order.”³² The confrontation between two Illyrian women in the pavilion on the ancient period, one from the upper class and the other from the plebian class, constitutes an echo of this myth even today, albeit stripped of the banners and signs that, in the communist period, would make the confrontation even more obvious.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have covered the operations of the NHM during and after the communist regime and analyzed the changes in the exhibitional concepts of the post-communist period. The paper has traced the processes of giving new meaning in the transition from museological concepts with ideology at their epicenter, to concepts that place objects at the center, while looking simultaneously at how mediated discourses have evolved with the passage of time. I have found that the dominant historical national-communist discourse of communist times has continued; it has continued only when it has found a new meaning in the framework of giving new dimensions to issues of national identity, whereas the purely communist aspect has been undervalued to the point at which it has been left in silence (e.g. class inequality), or has been substituted by new discourses with importance for national identity in the post-communist period.

30. “Projekt-Ideja e Muzeut Historik Kombëtar.” A.Q.Sh. F 490 (KM), D. 455 (1977), p. 118.

31. *Ibid.*, 119.

32. *Op. cit.*

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Everyone for and against Communism

The Paradoxes of the Change in the Political System 1990 - 1992 and of its Memory

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Introduction

References to the events of December 1990 and February 1991 differ greatly from references to other events of importance in the history of Albania. We are dealing with a period with many actors, most of whom are still active in public life. We are also dealing with events whose archival documentation has still not been fully revealed to the public. Testimonies, diaries and media articles constitute important sources, but are insufficient. December 1990 is still shrouded in mystery, and it is considered one of the most important events in modern Albanian history. Since it carries so much weight, it continues to be a moment of success that all would like to claim a piece of, both those who were in the regime and those who stood in opposition to them.

Accounts of the events of December 1990 show that when the students began their protests in December 1990, their movement was in danger of remaining isolated only to particular parts of Tirana (Fevziu, 2012). The solidarity of a large portion of the city's residents with the students was decisive for the further progress of the protest (Krasniqi, 1998). The continuation of the Movement, on 9, 10, and 11 December, convinced the students and their supporters that there was no turning back, and that change was unavoidable. The only debate was in relation to the means for effecting change, the speed with which change would come, and the price of change.

On 11 December 1990, three days after the student protests began, the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania (PLA) held an extraordinary meeting. After long discussions, and under pressure from the students, the Plenum approved, in an open vote, the decision to allow political pluralism. In the voting, there were only two votes in opposition, against around 100 members of the Plenum and the 12 members of the Politburo. The weight of this decision was decisive.

Four elements, important and significant for the political reality of December 1990, can be highlighted regarding it.

First, the decision had legal force, even though it was not the direct product of a constitutional body charged with passing laws, the Committee of Ministers, the People's Parliament, or the Presidium of the People's Parliament. The decision was also not the product of a political agreement, as was the case in some other former communist countries, nor was it a deal between the party in power and the students who opposed them. In the form that it took, the decision taken by the Plenum of the PLA *de facto* reconfirmed the thesis that the Albania of 11 December 1990 continued to be purely a system of the party and the state, despite rhetoric of the regime that claimed that the changes that took place in the years 1989–1990 were the opposite.

Second, the decree did not annul Article 3 of the Constitution, according to which, "The Party of Labor of Albania, the vanguard of the working class, is the sole leading political force of the state and society. In the People's Socialist Republic of Albania the dominant ideology is Marxism-Leninism. The entire socialist social order is developed on the basis of its principles" (Constitution of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, 1976). This provision, and this constitution, was annulled at the end of April 1991, that is, four months after the revival of political pluralism and around one month after the first pluralist elections. The allowance of pluralism by a decision of the Central Committee of the PLA, without a change in the countervailing constitutional provision, created a loophole for revisiting the decision during the days and weeks to come.

Third, before, during, and after the meeting of the Plenum, senior officials of the PLA, including its leader, R. Alia, continued using harsh rhetoric against the students and their supporters, considering them dark forces and traitors who had an imperialist agenda of promoting national division, and casting the student protest scene as a scene of anti-Albanian forces. The harsh rhetoric of the state against the students, juxtaposed with the approval of their basic demand, brings to light the commanding nature of the Student Movement.

Fourth, it is worth analyzing which force/which individuals had been against political pluralism before 11 December 1990, given that on that day, 99% of the Politburo and the Central Committee of the PLA came out in favor of it. If part of the regime was in favor, and 100% of those opposed to the regime were also in favor, what, then, had been the stumbling block that so delayed the establishment of pluralism? Are we dealing with awareness change or with fear, with a tactical scheme to buy

time or with a conviction that the system must change? Are we dealing with an acceptance of pluralism or a misunderstanding of it, with political pluralism or a tactical scheme to change the system's image without threatening the system itself? The answer is best illustrated symbolically by an important detail: one month after the allowance of political pluralism, in January 1991, the communist leader, Alia, with Decree 7459, ordered that, in addition to historical figures of the National Awakening and Independence, the following were inviolable and protected by law: "monuments, busts, and memorials of any kind dedicated to the leader of the War of National Liberation and the founder of the new Albanian state, Enver Hoxha, and to other distinguished actors in the multi-century life of our people" (Krasniqi, 2004). Whoever criticized, violated, or damaged the dictator's symbols would be punished with imprisonment for a term of six months to three years.

The unfinished competition to take credit for the change

Twenty-seven years after the allowance of political pluralism, the perspective on the events of December 1990 and the change of 1990–1992, along with political, economic, and social changes, has evolved. A number of political theses have continued to be dominant – from the idea of change as programmed by the communist elites to the idea of change as coming more in the form of displacing the elites than as a process of fundamental change, from the assessment that change was brought about in populist fashion and without recognizing the challenges that the country would have to face, to the thesis that the events of that period constitute a revolution in the dimensions and capacities of revolutions under the conditions then extant in Albania. All accept that change was positive, peaceful, and that it came from above (university and liberal elites), despite fundamental differences over whether these features were the product of civic awareness and reaction or a part of a scene carefully prepared by departing elites.

After more than two decades, it is hard to find any author, researcher, or historian who gives highest marks to the balance of the transition. The great social and political problems that accompanied it, the periodic waves of emigration, the delay in the process of integration and economic rebound, the weakening of the state, and the large disconnect between the expectations of citizens and the product offered by political decision-makers, have significantly increased the number of those disappointed,

not by the change, but by the transition. Let us illustrate some of the more typical assessments of this process.

One author states: “even after two decades, Albania continues to remain far from other countries, it continues to be ‘held back in class,’ because it has not fulfilled the conditions set by United Europe. There is no doubt that this state of affairs does not match up either with my convictions, or with the demands of the students of December, in whose hearts simmers the great desire ‘We love Albania like all of Europe.’ This is the fault of Democratic and Socialist governments, which, throughout more than 20 years, have not been able to open to Albania the path of development and of speedy improvement . . . ” (Alia, 2010). This seems to be a fair assessment by an independent mind, an assessment that shows maximal respect for the student movement and the ambition of European integration.

The author is neither a dissident nor a liberal; rather, it is Ramiz Alia, the final communist leader, the person who, at the beginning of the 90s, was the chief opponent and obstacle to the student movement and the European project of Albania. In the quotation, as well as in the published memoirs he left behind, Alia does not acknowledge any personal responsibility, not even for the consequences of the communist period; to the contrary, he assigns responsibility exclusively to the post-communist elite and the transition. His position is not accurate as regards to the formation or the heritage of what he represents to the new system, nor to realistic viewpoints about it, but it is “politically correct” in regard to the new trend, the absurd competition to claim the banner of “anti-communism” and “warrior for democracy.” Alia himself, during the years 1988–1991, was the chief critic of every idea of political pluralism, stood against every pro-European citizens’ movement, accused students of being the instruments of the country’s enemies (Meksi, 2010), and was the author of the anti-historical thesis, “Albania is neither East nor West” (Biberaj, 1997), on the basis of which he justified his refusal to follow the wave of changes in all other former communist countries.

In the same spirit, based on a retouching of history and the trend of going from communist to anti-communist, from a fanatic of the old system to a fanatic of the new, a fictional library of historical memories of the events of 1990–1992 has been erected for the past 27 years. More books and written memoirs are available to the public that are written by former members of the Central Committee of the PLA and by the leading officials of satellite organizations of the PLA, which promote their personal role in the change of 1990–1991, than those that are written by

the category of former students of December, anti-communist individuals, or supporters of their movement. Every year, the media continue to repeat orchestrated facts, mainly fictional, that create the impression that change came from and within the system itself (Rama, 2012), that the process of democratization and transition was controlled, and that direct responsibility for negative divergences is to be assigned to the anti-communist and democratic forces.

The new political parties that were brought forth in 1990, and especially the main political force, the Democratic Party, pursued a pragmatic policy toward the system that was being left behind and toward those that held political offices. Its 1992 campaign slogan was “joint sufferers and joint offenders,” a slogan with a peaceful and vote-maximizing aim, but one that placed an equal sign between the regime and its political victims. The slogan had short-term effects: it created a climate for the peaceful transfer of power, for social reconciliation, and for the avoidance of every possible conflict; but on the other hand, it granted amnesty to many individuals and events of the communist period, becoming a powerful obstruction to the process of separating from the past by means of justice. The thesis “joint sufferers and joint offenders” implies that everyone was simultaneously invited to be voters and investors against the old regime, and therefore creditors in the assessment that the majority, including a large portion of communists, contributed to its collapse. After the elections and the 1992 transfer of political power, the rhetoric changed, the thesis of reconciliation was replaced by the anti-communist discourse, and very quickly, the persecutors of yesterday began to be felt and shown as the victims of the new system – a ritual that is repeated on the eve of every anniversary or electoral campaign.

On the anniversaries of the events connected to 1990–1992 Albania, efforts are increasingly being made to create the idea that the current political elite played a fundamental role in the political change of those years. For more than a decade, there has been a harsh rivalry between the Democratic Party, founded in December 1990, and the Socialist Party, the successor to the Party of Labor, to take credit for the change, and to create the idea that today’s leaders of the left and the right were also contributors to the democratic movement of 25–27 years ago. Based mainly on memories and sponsored witnesses, on personal feeling and made-up facts, the trend toward displaying oneself as an anti-communist in the first hours of democracy is repeated especially during election campaigns and in the memorialistic chronicles of the time. Because the Albanian media are dominated by young journalists, their tendency to take for granted the

facts and names that offer themselves up is so great that a vicious circle of citations is then created in closed groups of friends and on the basis of made-up facts – a circle that is increasingly taken for granted and is accepted every year as the truth.

In contrast to other former communist societies, the Albania of the last communist period did not have any of the basic elements of the anti-communist identity. Albania did not have dissidence or organized liberal groups; it did not have a government in exile, nor an inspirational role for religious institutions; it did not have civic or labor movements; it did not have private property, nor the ability to travel outside the country. Those political prisoners who had managed to survive were freed only three months after the approval of political pluralism and only one week before the first multi-party elections, which, *de facto*, rendered it impossible for them to play an active role in the creation of new parties and in the transitional phase toward the new system. Being a closed country, isolated in totalitarianism and under the complete control of the communist elite, the entire new political, media, and intellectual elite that was presented after December 1990 had, *de facto*, a communist upbringing and was the product of a closed system (Rama, 2012).

Everyone communist vs everyone anti-communist

Albanian society's encounter with pluralism turned out to be much more difficult than had been expected. For most citizens, who were born and raised according to Stalinist dictates, indoctrinated and oppressed, afraid and distinctly rural, the encounter with freedom resembled an encounter with insecurity and a crossroads between a denied life and a new reality with its unrecognizable multifacetedness (Biberaj, 2011). Intellectuals and students who founded the first political opposition lived within a range of proximity of 3–4 square kilometers in Tirana, whereas the other Albania was much less passionate, less courageous for change, less clear on the need for change and on the priorities of the new system, and naturally, more limited in its exercise of political rights and liberties.

After 27 years it is difficult to find people who accept that, at that time, they were not supporters of change; but in reality, in December 1990 and January 1991, the democratic opposition that had just been created encountered unimaginable obstacles: even in cities with an anti-communist tradition, it was difficult to find people who would take on the task of creating contact points for the opposition, to stand for election,

or to distribute the political program of the opposition. Such difficulties were faced even in cities that made up the bastion of the right in the first decade of the transition, such as Shkodra or Kavaja, Korça or Vlora, Elbasan or Durrës. Educated with the idea that the risk of conflict with the party and the state could be so great as to threaten one's life, property, and family, the number of supporters of the opposition increased, but the number of them who accepted public representation of it was clearly on the margins of existence.

In the third week of February 1991, when the statue of the dictator Hoxha was toppled, the reaction from the periphery was frightful. Starting in Berat, and then stretching across the entire country, the group "Enver's Volunteers" was created, and it collected over 1.1 million signatures in defense of the dictator and in favor of placing back his busts. Their movement created a significant basis for civil conflict and prefigured the results of the first parliamentary elections of 1991, in which the PLA won that many votes. One year later, in the elections of 1992, under new political conditions, 1.1 million citizens, among whom around 600,000 were part of the aforementioned anti - historical movement of February 1991, joined the democratic opposition and voted for it (Krasniqi, 1999). The crossing over, within one year, of 1.1 million pro - dictator supporters and pro-PLA voters to 1.1 million votes against them, shows the severe deficiency concerning political clarity and political and civic awareness.

The number of such paradoxes is typical of many aspects of the years 1991 and 1992. Thus, in February 1991, the dominant part of the PLA demanded the legal prohibition of the opposition and accused it of being divisive, of working as agents, and of being a threat to national sovereignty; but only 90 days later, the same majority was extended to the opposition for the creation of a joint government. The two-party coalition functioned for six months, until new political conditions were created for early elections and the transfer of political power. If until March 1991 the former targets of political persecution would still be considered by the majority of pro-communist citizens as enemies who had received the punishment they had deserved, five months later, a parliament dominated by communists approved general amnesty for this group, and indirectly, the acceptance of the communist crime and the responsibility of the state for their compensation.

Such opposing forces of movement within a short period of time influenced the formation of dilemmas concerning whether we are dealing with a quick process of awareness-building or with the gravitation of a "pre-democratic herd" to the next government and the next winner,

whether the change reflects an advancement in the recognition of political pluralism or if the two cases reveal a misunderstanding of it.

Cultural paradoxes of the new political system

The first political programs were the most organized embodying act for the level of political formation for the elites of 1990. Referring to the minimal program of the DP of 1990 and the electoral program of the PP-PS of 1991, unifying elements are easily noticed, especially in connection to the forms of discourse, its content, and the consensus on avoiding fundamental problems regarding the past. Some of the findings of these programs are significant.

The two parties use outdated terminology, in contrast to the discourse that is attributed to the new democratic system. Dominant in the parties' programs are the expressions "will fight / fight," employed 19 times in 80 lines of the PD's program, and in the same proportion in the program of the PLA of late December 1990. In its program, the PD promises the opening of the country toward the West, whereas PP-PS took a position against the role of international actors in the region and in Albania and against the inclusion of military alliances, the implication being NATO.

The two parties behave not as political forces competing for political leadership of the country, but as global political forces, a mentality that has its source in the rhetoric of the communist period. The two parties' programs speak of the involvement of the party at the global level, of a commitment not to change borders, and of peaceful politics, etc. Specifically, the program of the PP-PS speaks clearly of "solidarity and support for independence movements everywhere in the world" or other expressions of global engagement that are not typical in a democracy but are taken from similar expressions employed by the program of the PLA itself before 1990.

The parties do not have a clear critical position toward the old (communist) regime and the consequences of its heritage. In the PD's program, there is no reference to it at all, whereas in the PP-PS's program, it is given the highest marks. In both cases, the old regime and the communist leadership still in power are given credit for the initiation of the democratization process and for the fact that they themselves are engaged in the continuation of this process. The maximally high marks given by the PP-PS's program, for three historical merits – victory in war, recon-

struction and development, and state and national independence – stand in deep contrast with everything that the new democratic system represents and what the political parties themselves, and their leaders of that period, express later on in their own remembrances or memoirs.

Other detailed elements, such as the commitment to emancipation of the peasantry and the youth, that “the woman perform her noble mission” (Meksi, 2010), or that the right of atheist propaganda be protected, resemble the continuation of the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution of the ‘60s, are taken as clichés, and are not in line with the principles of the new political system. Neither of the political parties, including the PD, refers in its minimal program to the crimes of communism, the liberation of political prisoners, their rehabilitation, the diaspora, nor even to the new emigration. Neither of them cites or offers solutions for any of these categories, which played a decisive role in the break between the two systems.

Great paradoxes are also to be found in political concepts with regard to bringing to life new institutions. The very fact that pluralism came as the result of a decree, which did not amend the constitutional provision that prohibited pluralism, and that the competitive system continued for another four months while a constitution remained in force that sanctioned its prohibition, shows the deep contrast between the way in which pluralism came to life in Albania and the ability of the new political elite to translate it into the political culture.

It is also worth emphasizing that in the elections of 1991, political associations were also allowed to compete, Albanian emigrant parties outside the country were prohibited from forming parties, the Central Election Commissioner himself directed the electoral process and was at the same time a candidate in the elections, members of Parliament carried out their parliamentary positions part time while keeping and exercising their previous professions, symbols of the communist system continued to be active until after the first pluralist elections, and on 31 March, citizens in multiple areas voted with banners, portraits, or busts of the dictator Hoxha present inside the hall.

In addition, it is worth emphasizing the experiment with the Presidential Council (February – April 1991), an unconstitutional structure, formed in extraordinary circumstances and with extraordinary powers. Its establishment and function was not referred to in the Constitution, but all state institutions were held accountable before it, the parties accepted it, and its acts were legally valid. The same logic – the functioning of pluralism with the same methods and mechanisms of the monistic period – was

also applied in the formation of the new political parties, giving them the right to extend and conduct activities in all productive centers, including in the state public administration.

A significant detail also relates to the first pluralist media, the newspaper RD, which, although it was the first newspaper under conditions of the free press, was in essence a party paper. In its first issue, there were salutations not only to the political figures who inspired and led political change, but also to important political leaders of the PLA, including two of its members of Parliament from before 1990, one of whom was a member of Parliament during the coming years, 1991–2001.

Conclusions

The retrospective analysis of the events of 1990–1992, and their treatment today in instruments of collective and institutional memory, proves the thesis that the historical period of breaking with the past and forming the new system is characterized more by the feature of the displacement of elites, of imposition by an urban liberal minority, than by a process that has at its foundations a project of structural reform or democratic revolution. In many respects, the new system continued to function as an appendix severed from the old system, and the main bearers of this phenomenon were the main political parties and the institutions they created. There are a series of arguments that support the assessment that the features of this period lie at the foundation of political transition and in many of its elements, and that they determine or continue to condition it. The transition to democracy, more than a legal or political act, turned out to be an extraordinary test of moral values, of cultural formation, and of the sense of responsibility.

The findings do not allow us to understand clearly whether the results achieved during the transition, especially at its beginning, constitute the most that could have been achieved by elites with the same upbringing but with different perspectives and political interests, or whether we are dealing with the impossibility of balancing due to the influence of the communist heritage and geopolitical developments in the region. The dilemma of whether the transition constitutes the maximum of values and standards that Albanian society could offer continues to be dominant, as well as simultaneously a critical indicator of our cultural ability to represent the values of a new system not lived through during our age-old state history.

The pursuit of protagonism and the retouching of facts and historical events constitute a negative trend of the transition and a weak point in the relationship of the elites with the truth, with history, and with themselves. The effort to create the idea that Albanians were democratic in their formation but that the dictatorship made change impossible, or that change was the clear will of a consensus rather than a harsh battle between the minority that demanded it and the majority that refused it, has an impact on the deformation of facts and events, ignores the fact that the dictatorship in Albania was more an Albanian product than one imposed from the outside, and that, in contrast to the majority of former communist countries, the resistance to communism in Albania after the end of the '40s turned out to be much weaker and almost negligible.

The findings from the analysis of the parties, programs, decision-making, and institutions of 1990–1992 help us to better understand the problems in the democratic formation of Albanian society today and the cultural level on which the pluralist system came to life. They also can contribute to the processes of breaking with the past and constructing historical memory.

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Remembrance between the Public and the Private Sphere

The Young Generation's Borrowed Memory of the Communist Period

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Introduction and methodological approach

The following study aims to analyze young people's "memory" of the communist period in Albania, a period that they themselves, especially those born after 1990, did not live through. In my multi-year engagement as the head of the Institute for Democracy, Media and Culture (IDMC), but also as a professor at the University of Tirana, I have long observed the lack of knowledge on the part of the young generation about the communist regime and its effects on Albanian society up to today. I wanted to know how they form their memory, what channels or media they use to derive information about a historical period that they did not themselves experience, and how reflective they are in the face of this information. In order to answer these questions, I analyzed works that young people submitted to the competitions organized starting in 2015, "Born in the '90s" and "Ask the grandparents" (2016 and beyond). The focus of the competitions was to bring forth family testimonials and histories, but also young people's personal reflections based on information that they receive in school or from different cultural products that we may call "vehicles of memory."¹

In speaking of collective memory, the scholar Jan Assmann draws a distinction between communicated and cultural memory. The former is derived through oral testimonials and is transmitted from generation to generation,² whereas the latter form includes so-called "objective" cultural materials, including pictures, monuments, buildings, etc., but even though it is referred to as "objective," it is greatly influenced by the perspective or discourse of the group that analyzes it. The focus of this study will be communicated memory, specifically that of the family. The scholar Maurice Halbwachs assigns great importance to family memory, especially to the role that it plays for young people, since it allows them to

1. Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review* 102, (December 1997), 138.

2. Jan Assmann, "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität" in 'Kultur und Gedächtnis', Hrsg. Jan Assmann, Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988 (9–19).

compare the past and the present.³ The influence of the family – this is how we thought of and came up with the competition “Ask the grandparents” – would have to be very great in the case of Albania, since there is not much information in the school curriculum related to the dictatorship. In the two competitions, participants were asked to draw on family memory about events that happened before the fall of the communist regime, but also after the fall. They were free to choose their own sources, whether they be people, documents, objects, etc.

This article is part of a broader research project on the memory of the young generation in post-communist countries, based on reflections collected through focus-group interviews and creative projects such as competitions. It will be based on an analysis of 35 essays selected from the competition “Born in the ’90s” (2015), as well as 20 works from the competition “Ask the grandparents” (2016 and 2017), both organized by the IDMC. In the 2015 competition, the young people were born between 1990 and 1997 (i.e., 18–25 years of age) and they were asked to express their opinions about communism and the period after its fall. From 2016 onward, the age of the participants was higher than 15. The author is aware that this study cannot be considered representative from a sociological perspective, due to differences in age groups and the lack of coherence in the selection of competition genres (essay vs. multimedia) that were analyzed. We divided the works into categories that display common and divergent elements, using the technique of groupings and typologies in Susann Kluge’s qualitative research.⁴

The main question that weaves through the entire paper is: How is it possible for memories to be formed in a generation that did not experience a specific historical period? Memory of communism in Albania is kept alive by the generation that lived through it. We encounter this in media rhetoric, in everyday language and jargon, in political discourse, monuments, films of the time, museums, national holidays, and interpersonal communication. Therefore, it may seem paradoxical that its traces can be found even in the generation born after 1990. The hypothesis of this study is that the *memories* of the young generation are borrowed from stories within the family, from information in the media and on the Internet, and that these memories are influenced by the media that are used. It will be difficult to support this hypothesis with the works of

3. Halbwachs Maurice. “On Collective Memory” (ed., trans. Coser L). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

4. Kluge, Susann: Empirisch begründete Typenbildung in der qualitativen Sozialforschung, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum Qualitative Social Research* 1 (1), Art. 14 (2000). Online <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewFile/1124/2498>, 07.10.2018.

other authors, since most studies on memory focus mostly on collective memory⁵ and the politics of memory in post-communist countries, the analysis of specific events, the comparison between the experiences of different countries, etc.

Category 1: “Negative” memory

The first category will deal with works that focus mostly on negative experiences of the communist period, mainly derived from family memory and from some other secondary source. Especially in essays that reflect on specific family events, “negative memory” of communism implies obstacles, few or non-existent opportunities, as well as individual deprivations. Included here are “lack of democracy,” “freedom of expression,” “prohibition of religious faith,” “rural poverty,” etc.

A 21-year-old woman writes: “In my family the events after 1990 were frequently spoken of, along with what all Albanians had lost before this time, that is, during the dictatorship. (...) The memories of my grandparents, parents, and relatives help me to evaluate my country, the freedom that you couldn’t have at that time...” (essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

In a few cases we have genuine reflections like that of a 25-year-old man: “When it comes to the violation of liberty, it is very difficult to find arguments to justify the step taken by the (Communist) Party. It is painful to think that the people fought to win the freedom of the Nation, only then to lose that of the individual” (essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

That young people value democracy and freedom of speech today, relying on information received mainly in the family and through extra-curricular sources, is shown in this example: “Luckily, today we do not fear that, because of the words that we say, we will be shot or hanged by the state” (19-year-old, essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

The negative dimensions of the dictatorship are accepted without exception when it comes to the prohibition of religious practice after 1967. Likewise, there exists a wide consensus on village life and its difficult conditions: “Wheat bread came only in the summer, but even that was of low quality, unbaked, and it caused food poisoning. In the city, villagers were not allowed to buy bread, they told us ‘you aren’t from our neighborhood’” (23-year-old, essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

Poverty in the village was borrowed in the memory of many young people as a shocking experience, to which cannot find reference in the

5. See: “Introduction”.

reality of today. In many essays it is referred to by expressions such as: “corn bread that even lead cannot pierce”; the villager went to work with “a bottle of water and sugar and an onion”; “we were in the village but we didn’t have dairy,” etc.

Category 2: “Positive” memory

In the second category, works were selected that convey “positive memory” of specific aspects of the regime that the young people refer to as though they were their own, generally with the aim of criticizing the present. This kind of almost “nostalgic” approach seems paradoxical, since the young generation has gained much more from the present than previous generations. Positive memory is transmitted in the following terms: “During communism it was cleaner, without cars and polluted air”; “people were happier and friendlier with one another”; “there was no unemployment”; “life was secure”; “there was no crime”; “everyone *was* equal.”

Young people speak of problems with education, as though they had experienced them personally in the previous regime. They repeatedly put forth as arguments: “the communist regime made positive steps regarding ‘illiteracy’”; “more schools were established”; “admissions criteria for university were stronger than today, so only the most talented continued their studies.” But there was a lack of reflection on systematic policies against the education of young people who came from “enemy” families or families “with stains on their biography” and arguments for why they were not allowed to pursue their studies like the children of more privileged families: “The state was bad, but education reforms were better than today, the teachers were better prepared, they did not all go to university, but those who went had a secure job (21-year-old, essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

Current youth unemployment leads them to borrow an uncritical perspective in analyzing the education policies of the past, and indirectly, their perception is that for every spot available for study there was also a secure job: “The working class was necessary for the construction of socialism, so it was given a chance to be educated, whereas villagers were not. Despite the difficult life, one of the good aspects of the system was that everyone was employed” (19-year-old, essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

Likewise, the effort to justify the regime, or some aspect of it, appears when they directly compare the conditions of the past with the “disap-

pointing situation” of today: “Every regime has its good and bad points! Our grandparents’ generation suffered more than our parents’ generation, who are now around 50 years old. Their life is divided between communism and democracy. My parents say that during communism it was good. People were more conscientious, everything was genuine, not like today, when people lie, spend their time on social networks, are slaves to money and not to happiness” (23-year-old, essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

What stands out in the above is that even the terms that are used are completely borrowed from family discourse. The account of a 20-year-old youth illustrates for us the positive memory influenced by the nostalgia of his grandparents and relatives: “Born in the 1990s, I cannot know what communism was, but my grandfather says that even though communism was a sick system, it secured for us an industry rich in different variations, it offered us thousands of job and educational opportunities. But after the ’90s, factories were destroyed, leaving thousands of families without work and sinking Albania and its economy into a black hole. They even fired my grandfather from his job” (essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

In the above examples, it seems like everything that young people write about the past is closely connected with personal histories recounted within the family. Currently we lack more detailed data on the family background from which young people with “positive memory” come from – families that supported the communist regime, what professions they came from, working class or something else. But this almost nostalgic perception of a time that the young people did not experience has likely been fed by family stories as a result of disappointment at the results of the democratic period. The lack of historical knowledge about the communist period is not only an Albanian reality. The Romanian scholar Albena Hranova brings similar results from her experience with students in Romania.⁶

Category 3: Confused memory

The judgments of young people are often given in a dichotomous manner, feeding into a form of dualistic, confused memory. The dichotomy comes to light in a fragment excerpted from the essay of a 22-year-old: “Was communism bad? No, my grandfather tells me. Maybe because

6. Albena Hranova. “Loan Memory: Communism and the Youngest Generation”, in: *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe* (edited by Augusta Dimou, Maria Todorova and Stefan Troebst), CEU Press, 2014, (233–251).

he was then a school director, whereas now he has been relegated to receiving a ridiculous pension that is not even enough for his medicine. Together with my father, he praises the education of the time. Some people are nostalgic for that time, tout the large dams that were build, the new roads that were opened, the electrification of the country, etc., but the massive, unjustified, and costly building projects such as bunkers, tunnels or weapons dull this perspective” (essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

Here, the woman’s critical and reflective distance toward memories transmitted within the family stands out. It is not known whether she includes her grandfather and father in the “nostalgic”; it is nonetheless a fact that she is uncertain about distancing herself completely from those who praise the communist regime. This is obvious from the careful term, “dull,” that she used in the context of the so-called successes of socialism.

That family memory is superimposed upon that of the individual and does not conform to information about the dictatorship that they learned in school is clearly shown in the following examples: “It seems that communism planted a bad seed many meters below Albanian ground and in these veins we have communist-infected blood” (essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

This language we find frequently used by the oldest people, mainly victims of persecution or political prisoners. Sometimes the weight of this borrowed memory is perceived as burdensome for young people, such as in the case of a 24-year-old who writes: “In the eyes of everyone born after the 1990s, there are living views into that period (communism), due to the fact that we live seeing our parents and others who have been educated in that spirit. In a deep sense, they are the ones who are straining to fit in with us” (essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

The dualism is especially clear when young people feel confused in the use of terms that symbolize the dictatorship: “that time,” “before the ’90s,” or “in Enver’s time,” that are still frequently used by their parents and grandparents as a part of the “collective memory.” Likewise, they had problems in the clear usage of the terms “communism” and “socialism” when speaking of the regime before the democratic changes. This linguistic uncertainty surrounding the terminology that describes the communist regime has been revealed in other studies as well, such as for example in the case of journalists that reported on the death of dictator Hoxha’s successor, Ramiz Alia, in 2012.⁷ Judgments about the period 1944–1990,

7. Uncertainty was also encountered among journalists in Godole and Danaj’s study on the reporting that journalists did on the death of Ramiz Alia. See also: Godole, Jonila and Danaj, Sonila. “Roli i gazetarëve në ridimensionimin e kujtesës kolektive në Shqipëri,” in *Transformimi i Medias dhe Kujtesa Kolektive në Shqipëri*, Westprint: Tirana, 2015, (169–185).

it seems, even in the examples up to now, are a puzzle with information collected here and there, framed by mistaken and confused facts, and with uncertain terminology. This dualism, on the other hand, demonstrates a lack of "cultural memory" on the part of Albanian society, in relation to the historical period of communism, and that, in the young generation, is best revealed by their essays.

Category 4: Conflicting memory

In some of the young people's essays, a contravention on their part can be noticed toward opinions inside the family and demonstrate an ability to reassess their memory when they come into contact with new information from school (academic) materials or other sources.

A woman born in 1991 writes: "My father, being from the region of Haxhi Lleshi, one of the political behemoths of the communist period, defends him and truly believes that he followed the Marxist line. Here I don't agree with him at all, and it seems that we will never agree, because, according to me, neither the war fought by the communists in 1944-45, nor anything else, can justify Lleshi's monstrous crimes and those of the cruel system" (essay, "Born in the '90s").

An 18-year-old man from Hekali of Mallakastër, a region that supported the Communist Party during World War II and later, writes: "The dictatorship killed you if you weren't careful. Therefore, you had to shut your mouth and your ears. These things seem terrifying to us today. But that comrade Enver (Hoxha) who was at the top, put those rules into place that were valid for others, but not for himself. Thus, as a violator of freedom, he could never be a patriot, so long as he denied freedom to his own people" (essay, "Born in the '90s"). It is interesting that, despite the just criticism put forth here of the conformism of individuals who lived under the dictatorship, the youth still uses the term "comrade Enver," which demonstrates a reminiscence from stories within the family and the terminology that is still used by those nostalgic for the regime and the dictator.⁸

But we also have direct reflections from young people about the actions of their grandparents in the following example: "In the library, from conversations with a scholar, I learned that my grandfather had been

8. In his article published in this work, Ildrit Idrizi brings interviews conducted with various people in the region of Shkodra on their experiences during the communist regime. What stands out is the typology of those who judge communism as normal and conformity as a logical way to have a happy life: "Typologies of private memory of communism in Albania".

the vice president of the Court of Cassation, a leader of the front and a member of the Communist Party. I learned an unknown part of a person who I had known only through the frames of yellowed photographs” (21-year-old, essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

The woman does not reflect on her grandfather’s life and work, but suppresses her family memory by using a more general viewpoint to justify the situation, continuing: “During the long transition until today, the truth about the courts still remains hidden in the periodicals of judicial opinions. The reasons he sent behind bars the persecuted and those who sought change, who sought reform, who denounced people as enemies of the party, in whatever segment that came out against his commitment to communist morality, remain unnamed and silent” (ibid.).

The weight of family memory on the young generation comes out clearly in the following passage submitted by an 18-year-old woman: “Parents and grandparents always told me about the dictatorship, about that kind of regime that brought them a life of hardship. Their suffering has also infected us, as a result of what parents and family carry forward to the young generation. Psychologically exhausted, destroyed with a twisted personality, mentally raped, the family has carried forward to us not only a social deformation, but also a deformed worldview...” (essay, “Born in the ’90s”).

Category 5: Memory influenced by other sources

In a small portion of the essays we can see that their memory is influenced by other sources. “The self-isolation of our state kept us thousands of light-years away from the gradual development of other countries, resulting in the difference that is obvious today. But the management of the freedom of the Albanian people after the dictatorship brought them almost a new destruction” (18-year-old, essay, “Born in the ’90s”). What stands out here is the level of young people’s information from school-books or other study sources. But besides the school and the family, the media, specifically the genre of film, also have an impact on the formation of the memory of young people. A number of essays focused on the role that artistic (propagandistic) films have played in the childhood of young people born after 1990.

“My opinion of the unlive past is based on the films of Kinostudio, with which I then filled my free time, but even today I watch them often. Today we do not have Albanian films at all, we watch everything in for-

eign languages” (19-year-old, essay, “Born in the '90s”).

It seems as though young people take for granted the reality that is transmitted in these films, without reflecting in a critical manner on the reasons behind the production of those films, which served the dictatorship and the communist ideology in the construction of the “New Person.”⁹

One student said that “I know history from the faces of the many people I saw who left by ship in 1990, scared, but immovable in their decision to leave, I know it from university, from television” (23-year-old, essay, “Born in the '90s”). In an unconscious way, the woman is transposed by way of borrowed memories to the exodus of 1990, the fleeing on ships from the Port of Durrës, well known and fixed in photographs and film sequences. At the end of the sentence we understand that the way in which this knowledge was transmitted likely comes from school and television programs.

The medium sets the message¹⁰: Technology as a way of effective reflection on the past

In the multimedia competition “Ask the grandparents” (2016/2017), we can organize the topics treated in the following categories: a) daily life under communism; b) economic poverty and societal backwardness; c) the cult of the party and the leader; d) censorship in music, art, and behavior (foreign displays). These topics were treated in short videos of up to four minutes, while they were free to select not only the events, but also the form of production.

Especially in the works of 2017, it stands out that the young people, unlike their predecessors, focused on one or two aspects of communism, without being comprehensive. Up to this moment, we had thought that it

9. A debate on propaganda films produced during the dictatorship and the possibility of not showing them on Albanian television channels lasted for weeks during the spring of 2017. Directors and well-known artists of that period came out against pulling the films, calling the films objects of national value for collective memory and the education of the young generation that did not live through that time, whereas, on the other side, film critics demanded the reassessment of the list of films and a ban on a portion of them, especially those that discredit specific social categories, such as kulaks, priests or historical figures intentionally distorted by the ideology of the time. A study conducted by Jonila Godole and Erblin Vukaj on the specifics of this debate is in preparation and is expected to be published online at the end of 2018 on the webpage of IDMC publications (www.idmc.al).

10. The reflections of this paper are based on the analysis of multimedia works of young people in the competition “Ask the grandparents” (2016–2017) as well as on Marshall McLuhan’s reflections on the role of the medium as the message in his work, “The Medium is the Message” (1967/1991), and on technology’s impact on education in the 21st century, in his work, “The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century” (1989), Oxford University Press.

was the content of memory that formed their worldview on history, but from our analysis it is brought to light that for the young generation it is the medium that sets the message. Here there is also a difference between the generations, because the high school students of today (15–19 years old), the so-called digital generation, do not use the medium simply as a working tool, but also identify with it.

What stands out is that the works in multimedia have turned out to be more critical toward the past. There could be a number of reasons for this: first, because the essay has a strong tradition in school (drafting), and traditionally teachers have required a considerably personal and emotional perception, without academic references, secondary sources, etc. In the abstract accompanying one of the winning works in the competition “Ask the grandparents, 2016,” the 15-year-old girl attempts to place her work on a background that is as searching and reflective as it is creative with the form in which she chooses to present it: “Through the stories of my grandfather, I saw communism as a ride on the train. Since it was a period I did not live through, I converted every testimonial of his into a station, in every station there was a character that represented an element of the dictatorship. These characters are mainly ordinary people who fell prey to the state bureaucracy.”

In her explanation, she reduces the repressive apparatus of the communist regime to “state bureaucracy,” which she nevertheless places in a critical framework, considering the final production.

Distinctions are also evident if we compare generations. With few exceptions, those born at the beginning of the 1990s cannot manage to give their analysis of the system, but only the memory borrowed from their family. This perhaps is connected to the lack of recognition of the concrete damages that the dictatorship caused, given that the school curriculum (where the subject of history is included as well) started to change in earnest only after the 2000s. Likewise, the media as well were more neutral in the first decade after the fall of the regime. Meanwhile, the generation of current high-school students (15–19 years of age), born at the beginning of the 2000s, seems to have more information regarding that time. At least in relation to dictatorships and totalitarian systems, it is mainly here that films and documentaries on the crimes of Nazism (the Holocaust), which is treated in school, but also films and documentaries on television and the internet, could have had an impact.

Regarding the medium, the technology of the video seems to require them to reflect more deeply on the specified topic. Unlike the essay, the medium continuously demands images, interviews with witnesses of

the time, authentic sources such as photographs, documents, clothing, objects of the time, up to the dramatization of situations to illustrate the moments and specified events that left an imprint on them during the study of that historical period. Audio-visual and digital works generally demand more collaboration and commitment in the group that indirectly brings greater reflection and analysis, since knowledge is consulted by many actors, going beyond oneself. At the same time, the process of collecting information, selecting the message and personalizing through a concrete narrative, happens here.

Conclusions

From our analysis, it comes to light that collective memory can be transferred and transformed from generation to generation, preserving both verbal and visual signs. Given the impact that family memory has on young people, we understand that further research on individual memory can be a chance to broaden the concept of collective memory, but also to discern its limits.

The memory of Albanian young people comes mostly from oral testimonials within the family, which remain the main source of their information. It is not schools, books, media, and archives that form their opinion on the past. This can be taken as a criticism of the school curriculum, but on the other hand, it strengthens the role of oral history as the primary tool for the transmission of collective memory to the personal level. Family history turns out to be both negative and positive. The positive relates especially to the quality of education, employment, peace and security, free healthcare, equality for all at the social and societal level. Likewise, positive memory of communism is used to compare the past with the present, and to criticize the latter.

Negative memory relates mostly to persecution, the lack of liberty, censorship, and the prohibition of religion. We saw that memory from books and films play an important role, especially films realized during communism, which continue to be shown indiscriminately on Albanian television. Young people who carry forward positive memory from their families aim to be softer in their condemnation of communism. But we also saw that young people feel ashamed of relatives who were connected to the past system. This shows that, among young people, there is a binary, oppositional attitude between the victim and the persecutor.

The memory of post-communism that can be noticed in the young

generation is influenced by the parents' memories, and it is not susceptible to personal access. Although in their essays they "escaped" borrowed nostalgic designations from the environment in which they live, judging by the criticisms that they make of the past, it can be seen clearly that the post-communist period is treated more positively, with respect to opportunities, freedom of movement, the country's European perspective, and technological developments. The young generation still takes upon itself a family memory of communism, but communism as a system is not current for them. Remaining still to be analyzed is the memory of young people according to family, persecuted or not, with differing social and economic statuses, and their geographic origin. This would give us a broader view of the reasons behind their reflections.

Typologies of Private Memories of Communism in Albania

A Study Based on Oral History Interviews in the Region of Shkodra, with a Special Focus on the Period of Late Socialism (1976–1985)

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Object of the study, sources, and methodological approach

The aim of the study is to analyze and classify private memories of communism on the part of “the ordinary population”, approximately two decades after the change in the system. Its special focus is on memories of the period of late socialism, more specifically the period between the adoption of the Constitution of 1976 (which sanctioned autarky, among other things)¹ and the death of Enver Hoxha in April 1985, which corresponds approximately to the peak of self-isolation from the outside world² and the end phase of Enver Hoxha’s rule. On the one hand, based on comments made after the interviews, it may be supposed that witnesses of the time remember this period (like other periods) in a specific form, in contrast, for example, to the period of the final years of communism, when the economy collapsed and antipathy toward the regime, rising to an increasingly powerful hatred, set in among the people, while foreign stations were listened to and watched massively. On the other hand, however, the accounts also contain memories and judgments of communism in general, without temporal limits. The article is part of a study on communist rule and daily life in late-socialist Albania, based on archival documents and oral sources.³

Oral memories – like written documents – are subjective, one-sided,

1. See the sub-chapter “Kushtetuta e vitit 1976” in: Gjeçovi, Xhelal (ed.): *Historia e popullit shqiptar*. Vol. 4: *Shqiptarët gjatë Luftës së Dytë Botërore dhe pas saj 1939–1990*. Tiranë, 2008, 300–301.

2. Klaus-Detlev Grothusen dates the phase of self-isolation between 7 July 1978 (the official rupture in relations with the last ally, the People’s Republic of China) and 24 February 1988 (Albania’s participation in the Conference of Balkan Foreign Ministers in Belgrade), calling attention to the fact that, of course, temporal boundaries are not exact, and that both at beginning and at the end there were transitional phases: Grothusen, Klaus-Detlev: *Außenpolitik*, in: Grothusen, Klaus-Detlev (ed.): *Südosteuropa-Handbuch*. Vol. 7: *Albanien*. Göttingen 1993, 86–156: 136.

3. For the results of this project, see especially the monograph: Idrizi, Idrit: *Herrschaft und Alltag im albanischen Spätsozialismus (1976–1985)*. Berlin/Boston 2018.

and arbitrarily selected; they contain errors, retrospective interpretations based on, among other things, ideological convictions and current interests, and in some cases, even intentional manipulation.⁴ Psychological and neuroscientific studies have shown that memories of experiences undergo continuous modification and reinterpretation.⁵ Thus, the accounts of contemporary witnesses do not reflect in an identical way their former experiences, but mainly how these have been processed and continue to be processed.⁶ Nonetheless, memories can provide important knowledge about the characteristics and functioning of socialist societies, daily life, relations between society and state and between individual and state, etc.⁷ This article takes the view that the analyzed memories have undoubtedly been influenced by factors connected to the present day and to post-communist developments, but also significantly by the interviewees' experiences during communism.

The study is based on semi-structured interviews held in 2012, partly in the form of life narratives, with 35 contemporaries of late Albanian socialism. The interviewees belong to various generations (12 were born before the communist regime was installed, five in the first years of the post-war period, eight in the 1950s and ten in the 1960s). Twenty-six were male and nine were female. In four cases, the interviewees expressed a preference to be interviewed in pairs, and in one case as a group of three. The twenty-four other interviews were conducted individually. Since the object of the study is the perspective of "the ordinary population", no one who had held a leadership position during communism was interviewed. Furthermore, former political prisoners and those subject to internment

4. Vorländer, Herwart: Mündliches Erfragen von Geschichte, in: Vorländer, Herwart (ed.): *Oral History. Mündlich erfragte Geschichte. Acht Beiträge*. Göttingen 1990, 7-28: 15; Stephan, Anke: *Erinnertes Leben: Autobiographien, Memoiren und Oral-History-Interviews als historische Quellen*, Virtuelle Fachbibliothek Osteuropa (2004) (Digitales Handbuch zur Geschichte und Kultur Russlands und Osteuropas), 14-15, <https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/627/1/Stephan-Selbstzeugnisse.pdf>, 4.7.2018.

5. Stephan, Anke: *Von der Küche auf den Roten Platz. Lebenswege sowjetischer Dissidentinnen*. Zürich 2005, 60-61; Obertreis, Julia: *Oral History – Geschichte und Konzeptionen*, in: Obertreis, Julia (ed.): *Oral History*. Stuttgart 2012, 7-28: 27-28.

6. In addition to the works cited in the previous note, see also: Wierling, Dorothee: *Dominante scripts und komplizierte Lebensgeschichten – ein Kommentar zur Erforschung des Alltags im Staatssozialismus*, in: Obertreis, Julia / Stephan, Anke (ed.): *Erinnerungen nach der Wende. Oral history und (post)sozialistische Gesellschaften/ Remembering after the Fall of Communism. Oral History and (Post-)Socialist Societies*. Essen 2009, 323-327: 327.

7. Obertreis: *Oral History – Geschichte und Konzeptionen*, 28; Obertreis, Julia / Stephan, Anke: *Memory, Identity and "Facts". The Methodology of Oral History and Researching (Post-)Socialist Societies (Introduction)*, in: Obertreis/ Stephan (ed.): *Erinnerungen nach der Wende*, 37-61: especially 44-47.

were not included in the study, since their experiences and accounts have specific characteristics, the analysis of which, alongside those of the other interviewees, would have exceeded the capacity of this project. However, six of the interviewees had had a “bad political biography”, whereas four had been members of the basic organizations of the Party of Labor of Albania (PLA). The interviews were held in the region of Shkodra, with relatively equal balance between the city and villages. Similar studies in other regions of Albania will show how representative the results of this article’s analysis are; nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing that the aim here is not a sort of quantitative survey of political views on communism, but a qualitative analysis of narratives of private memories and of the factors influencing them.

In order to achieve the clearest possible view of the similarities and differences between the main narratives, the accounts have been analyzed according to a technique designed by Susann Kluge called “empirically grounded construction of types and typologies in qualitative social research”⁸. The accounts are contextualized by knowledge of Albanian (post-)socialism and by studies on other (post-)socialist societies and systems. For the purpose of anonymity, as was agreed upon with the interviewees, all names used here and in other publications of this project are pseudonyms assigned by the author.

Type 1: Communism as normality

The interviewees of this type described, and in some cases explicitly characterized communism, especially the late period, as something that was simply normal. They did not deny the state repression and the severe poverty, but they argued that even in these conditions, it was possible to live normally and to attain happiness in one’s personal life. The latter constituted the fulcrum of the accounts. Meanwhile, the political-ideological sphere was peripheral. The interviewees argued that the “key to happiness” in communism was obedience to “the rules of the time”, primarily political conformity. According to them, as long as the individual followed the rules, the state left him alone in “his business”. This kind of system seemed normal to the interviewees, and in any case, logical and unproblematic. Their accounts were characterized by a note of indifference, which lent support to the portrayal of communism as normal and

8. Kluge, Susann: Empirisch begründete Typenbildung in der qualitativen Sozialforschung, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1 (1), Art. 14 (2000), <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/viewFile/1124/2498>, 4.7.2018.

which indirectly contradicted the frequent post-communist interpretation of it as abnormal.

Among the most typical interviewees in this group were Ms. Latifi and Ms. Cakaj. Both of them highlighted their apathy toward politics during communism, as well as their loyalty to the state. Although political conformity during communism was mandatory, the interviewees did not portray this within the context of the dictatorship, but rather described it as something normal and logical. Ms. Latifi considered apathy and conformity not as contradictory, but as two attitudes that, in combination with each other, made it possible for the individual to have a happy life even during communism:

“I went to work, returned from work, I was completely normal in my life, ONLY because I was normal with the state, with the police, because ... if one spoke [against the regime], the spies [would denounce you].”⁹ “He who spoke [against the regime] really got it bad. If you minded your own business, your own interests [you didn’t have problems]. You were a good student, you continued your education, you became a doctor, you became something.”¹⁰ “Lucky him who minded his own business, his own interests. He got on with his business.”¹¹

Ms. Cakaj portrayed communism as a completely transparent system, with clear rules, which she explained with indifference as something normal and self-evident:

“During that time the state made the law clear to you, or better, it told you: Up to here I leave you freedom to act. If you transgress this line, you should know that you will go [to prison], you will be punished. If you broke the law, you knew what was waiting for you. [...] So, he who wanted to live without problems kept inside that shell. He who wanted to stick his head out, against the state, everyone knew where he went. And then not only he went there, but his entire family circle.”¹²

If not directly asked about politics and ideology, the interviewees of this type generally avoided those topics. And even after the interviewer asked them specific questions in this direction, in a fair number of cases they spoke only briefly about them and changed the subject relatively quickly. Personal life and work were the aspects that the interviewees considered to be the most important when they remembered the communist period. Thus, when they were asked about their perceptions of the self-isolating policies of the communist regime, Ms. Latifi and Ms. Sadiku

9. Transcript no. 29, Interview with Ms. Latifi (born in 1944) on 20.9.2012, 8.

10. Ibid., 9.

11. Ibid., 11.

12. Transcript no. 27, Interview with Ms. Cakaj (born in 1949) on 12.9.2012, 7.

answered as follows:¹³

“Yes, [isolation] seemed strange to me, but we didn’t know any better. It was strange, because we suffered a lot. I went to work in the morning, I left the children by themselves. They got ready for school themselves, or I got them ready ... I got a 10-Lek- [Albanian currency] fig or quince jam, I melted it in a plate and I spread it on their bread, I put it on the table and I left for work.”¹⁴

“What did we think?! I swear, we had enough work. It didn’t cross our minds that the government over there broke off [the relations with China].”¹⁵

The description of communism as normal and stable, the emphasis on personal life, work and the chance to attain happiness at the personal level, as well as the avoidance of the political sphere, or indifference towards it – these are well-known phenomena in other post-socialist societies. Kirsti Jõesalu, for example, has encountered almost identical narratives in Estonia. The object of her research is private memories during the period from the process of de-Stalinization (1956) until the beginnings of Gorbachev’s reforms (1985), thus, the so-called “late socialism”, which was characterized by the fall of political repression and the rise of stability, especially social stability. Precisely due to social stability and security, “late socialism” is remembered as a period of happiness at the personal level on the part of many contemporary witnesses, who, after the change in system, experienced a harsh transition characterized by insecurity and fundamental change.¹⁶

A second important reason, according to Jõesalu, relates to the tendency of contemporaries of communism to counter media discourses that portray life under communism purely negatively, characterized by suffering and humiliation. In this context, Jõesalu uses the term “the right to happiness”¹⁷. In retrospect, communism is considered a fundamentally

13. For similar reactions from contemporaries of communism in Czechoslovakia, see the following article, which relies upon oral history interviews held in the small city on the border with Austria, České Velenice, in the years 2006–2008: Blaive, Muriel: ‘The Cold War? I Have it at Home with my Family’. *Memories of the 1948–1989 Period Beyond the Iron Curtain*, in: Jarausch, Konrad/ Ostermann, Christian/ Etges, Andreas (ed.): *The Cold War. Historiography, Memory, Representation*. Berlin/Boston 2017, 194–214.

14. Transcript no. 29, Interview with Ms. Latifi (born in 1944) on 20.9.2012, 2.

15. Transcript no. 7, Interview with Ms. Sadiku (born in 1962) on 25.3.2012, 2.

16. Jõesalu, Kirsti: *Erfahrungen und Darstellungen – das sowjetische Alltagsleben in der estnischen Erinnerungskultur*, in: Obertreis/ Stephan (ed.): *Erinnerungen nach der Wende*, 329–343, especially 335. The results of this study are compiled in the publication: Jõesalu, Kirsti: *Dynamics and Tensions of Remembrance in Post-Soviet Estonia: Late socialism in the Making*. Tartu 2017, https://dspace.ut.ee/bitstream/handle/10062/55781/joesalu_kirsti.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, 19.9.2018.

17. See the article: Jõesalu, Kirsti: *The Right to Happiness – Echoes of Soviet Ideology in Biographical Narratives*, in: *Berliner Osteuropa Info* 23 (2005): *Alltag und Ideologie im Realsozialismus*, 91–99.

failed political, economic, and social system. Nonetheless, its contemporaries do not want their past life under this system to be considered a failure.¹⁸ For example, one of Jõesalu's interviewees explained that she does not claim to have especially valued communism, but when she remembers it, it has to do with "my life and my youth, I don't even want to start thinking negative."¹⁹ Meanwhile, Dorothee Wierling has observed that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, a euphoria about the future and a bitterness toward the "forty years lived for nothing" during communism were dominant at the beginning, among the contemporaries of East German communism. With the passage of time, they began to emphasize the free spaces and happiness and to connect their dignity with the evaluation of the communist period, whereas still later, on occasion, even the phenomenon of an ironic and arrogant nostalgia toward the West appeared.²⁰ Thus, the devaluation of communism can be perceived by its contemporaries as simultaneously a devaluation of their lives. This attitude can be deepened even further in cases in which the interviewer himself or herself did not experience communism and its suffering (because he or she is a foreigner or because of his or her youth) and, as a result, feelings of inferiority, doubt, or envy are awakened in the interviewees, feelings that can then influence the way in which they portray their lives and their memories.²¹

Third, the memory of communism as normal or the apathy towards it in retrospect could be the result of the lack of processing of the trauma suffered during this period at the personal and collective level. Alexey Golubev, for example, arrives at this conclusion in his research on the way in which the inhabitants of Karelia remember their experiences with repressive Soviet organs under Stalinism. Since those who were persecuted, especially until the beginning of de-Stalinization in 1956, could not speak openly with others, not even, up to a point, with close friends and family, they had to confront by themselves the trauma that they suffered. Under these conditions, the mechanisms of silence, forgetting, devaluation of the event, but also justification of state repression, were utilized.²²

The reactions that Golubev observed can be observed in the account

18. See Dorothee Wierling's comment on Jõesalu's article: Wierling: Dominante scripts und komplizierte Lebensgeschichten – ein Kommentar zur Erforschung des Alltags im Staatssozialismus, 326.

19. Jõesalu: The Right to Happiness – Echoes of Soviet Ideology in Biographical Narratives, 96.

20. Wierling: Dominante scripts und komplizierte Lebensgeschichten – ein Kommentar zur Erforschung des Alltags im Staatssozialismus, 325.

21. Ibid., 326.

22. Golubev, Alexey: Remembering and Re-Evaluating "Ashamed" Experience. Interaction with the Political Police in 1945-1956 in the Memory of the Soviet Karelian Population, in: Obertreis/Stephan (ed.): Erinnerungen nach der Wende, 263-274.

of Ms. Nebiu as well. Her father had been executed by the communists in the first years of the regime. The interviewee mentioned this fact only in passing, towards the end of the account. Even after more than two decades after the fall of communism, it seems that she could not speak at length about this painful event, nor could she explicitly denounce the communist regime:

“Enver killed my father – the whole world knows that. [...] He executed him. He knew that himself, the state itself knows how he was executed and all. [...] Enver Hoxha’s law, none of us could ... none of us could know [understand] it, nor could we speak, because there was him and no one else [like him] in this Albania.”²³

Despite the fact that memories are retrospective interpretations, it is possible, on the other hand, based on studies on other socialist societies and late Albanian socialism, to come to the conclusion that the way in which the interviewees of this type portray communism has also been deeply influenced by their perceptions at the time. Thus, the experience of life and the system as normal during the late period has been noticed in other socialist countries as well. Martin Sabrow explains this phenomenon not as superficial adaptation, powerless submission, or conscious political approval, but as an internalized acceptance of existing conditions and norms as self-evident.²⁴ Meanwhile, according to Mary Fulbrook, the East German society during the late period was characterized by “a very high level of awareness of the unwritten ‘rules’ of the GDR to which one had to conform in order to achieve one’s own ends, and [by an] explicit knowledge of the likely consequences of breaking these rules.”²⁵

It is precisely the internalization and habituation of the “rules” of the time on the part of the interviewees that can be considered an important factor for the portrayal of communism as normal (even) in retrospect. Studies in the psychological sciences have shown that, when people speak or act differently from their internal convictions, cognitive dissonance arises, which brings about an internal tension. According to experiments, most people, in order to eliminate this tension, change their beliefs, not their behavior. In this way, totalitarian systems, by sanctioning conduct and communication in public, manage over the long term to exercise a

23. Transcript no. 18/2, Interview with Ms. Nebiu (born in 1929) on 18.8.2012, 10.

24. Sabrow, Martin: Sozialismus als Sinnwelt. Diktatorische Herrschaft in kulturhistorischer Perspektive, *Potsdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien* 40/41 (2007), 9–23: 17, https://zzf-potsdam.de/sites/default/files/publikation/Bulletin/sabrow_sinnwelt.pdf, 4.7.2018.

25. Fulbrook, Mary: ‘Normalisation’ in the GDR in Retrospect: East German Perspectives on Their Own Lives, in: Fulbrook, Mary (ed.): *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979. The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?* New York/NY, Oxford 2009, 278–319: 307.

powerful influence even on people's internal world.²⁶ In the introduction to a volume with articles on the negotiation of "normalcy" in daily life under communism, Daniela Koleva describes the influence of the normative control of the state and the absence of alternatives, as follows:

"The normative control worked through the framing of all possible definitions of what one was and what one ought to do – definitions that could not be contested. It precluded alternative imaginings of social conditions thereby contributing to the legitimation of the existing ones. Thus the very existence of the regime over the years had the effect of stabilizing it by ruling out alternatives (even ideas of alternatives)."²⁷ "[P]eople gradually accept the labels: they start to recognize themselves in the categories imposed on them, to develop ideas of what is normal for 'their' category, and try to live up to it."²⁸

In interviews with contemporaries of Bulgarian socialism, Koleva has also observed that most of them structured their accounts around the theme of "work". The researcher explains this by reference to the central position that work enjoyed during socialism. Nonetheless, while the communist state conceptualized its importance from the political and ethical perspective, as the duty of every socialist citizen, the work for the latter constituted first and foremost a fundamental aspect of identity and the basis for stability and security in their personal life.²⁹

In a study of the forms of behavior and socialization in East Germany, Angela Brock argues that in the late period, after the mid-1960s, most people did not perceive the political system as a terrible dictatorship, but as something given, existing, which it would not cross their minds to call into question, since they did not know what life was like in another system.³⁰ In Albania, isolation from the outside world was even greater. The average age of the population during the late period was extremely young, for example, 26 years of age in 1985. According to statistics, 37% of the population that year was under the age of 15, and almost 75% were

26. See Ursprung, Daniel: Herrschaftslegitimation zwischen Tradition und Innovation. Repräsentation und Inszenierung von Herrschaft in der rumänischen Geschichte in der Vormoderne und bei Ceaușescu. Kronstadt 2007, 227–242, especially 228–229.

27. Koleva, Daniela: Introduction. Socialist normality: Euphemization of Power or Profanation of Power?, in: Koleva, Daniela (ed.): Negotiating Normality. Everyday Lives in Socialist Institutions. New Brunswick/NJ 2015, VII–XXXIV, XIII.

28. Ibid., XII.

29. Koleva, Daniela: 'My Life Has Mostly Been Spent Working'. Notions and Patterns of Work in Socialist Bulgaria, *Anthropological Notebooks* 14/1 (2008), 27–48.

30. Brock, Angela: Producing the 'Socialist Personality'? Socialisation, Education, and the Emergence of New Patterns of Behavior, in: Fulbrook (ed.): Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979, 220–252, especially 251.

under the age of 40.³¹ This means that when Enver Hoxha died, three out of every four people had been born and socialized under communism, had never experienced any other system or leader, and had taken part regularly in the rituals of the legitimation of the regime, rituals that – as explained above – had a considerable psychological influence.

According to Katherine Verdery, socialist societies were conceptualized as a family, led by the state/party in the role of the parent. In this context, she uses the terms “socialist paternalism” and “parent-state”³². In communist Albania, “Enver” was not perceived just as a political leader, but as “the master of the house”. Thus, obeying and respecting him was considered by many contemporaries not only as obligatory political conformity, but also as normal behavior, self-evident and in line with tradition. This outlook is also clearly reflected in the memory of communism on the part of some of the interviewees. Thus, for Ms. Latifi – who, in fact, during her account had highlighted her political apathy, both under communism and today, – obedience toward “Enver” and punishment of disobedience were logical:

“[Punishment of political non-conformity; I.I.] seemed like a normal thing to me, because you couldn’t go against the master of the house. The master of the house knows the rules better than you do. As if my son told me ‘you don’t know’. Do I not then contradict my son?! Because I know more than my son. [...] [Enver Hoxha] was absolute, he was absolute [enjoyed absolute authority; I.I.]”³³

Type 2: Communism as a dictatorship and terrible suffering

The common characteristics of the interviewees that recall communism as a period of suffering, repression, and poverty are clearly discernable. First, to this group belong former victims of political persecution or individuals whose the relatives had had at least occasional but nonetheless painful experiences with the apparatus of repression. Second, communism was remembered mainly negatively by interviewees who were of a young age during the late period and who had been consumers of foreign media. Paradoxically, the latter, in the majority of cases, came from

31. Hall, Derek: *Albania and the Albanians*. London, New York 1994, 65–66. On demographic development in communist Albania, see also: Schmidt-Neke, Michael/ Sjöberg, Örjan: *Bevölkerungsstruktur*, in: Grothusen (ed.): *Südosteuropa-Handbuch*, 464–490.

32. See the chapter “From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe”, in: Verdery, Katherine: *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton/NJ 1996, 61–82.

33. Transcript no. 29, Interview with Ms. Latifi (born in 1944) on 20.9.2012, 6.

families with “good biographies”, and precisely for this reason they had been allowed to, and had been in an economic condition, to purchase televisions.³⁴ In both cases, it can clearly be noticed that the antipathy toward communism originated from experiences and attitudes of the time, even though the interviewees occasionally use terminology and arguments from current anti-communist discourse. The forms of antipathy toward communism vary considerably, from intense hatred for everything related to communism to a focus on specific aspects. In almost all cases, local communists were remembered especially negatively, whereas the interpretation of the figure of Enver Hoxha varied.

Mr. Ahmeti, whose family, due to its *kulak* origins, had been systematically discriminated against, remembered communism as a period of injustice, pain, and continuous psychological pressure:

“My grandfather was a kulak. [Enver Hoxha] made him [declared him a kulak] only because of his wealth. And we didn’t have any rights at all. NONE! In other words, we were, as though ... not with the same rights as others.”³⁵ “Without any rights at all. I was careful because they would take me and send me to prison.”³⁶ “If you made a little mistake, they sent you to prison, there would be no question about that. We were careful, because for 3,000 Lek, Enver sent you to prison that [with the accusation that] you stole from the working class.”³⁷ “[Spies] were folded into [hidden] the curtains. As in this curtain here? This is how they were folded in [the interviewee demonstrates; I.I.].”³⁸

Mr. Ahmeti also assigned a special importance in his account to the worry or the anxiety of surviving economically, while after the interview he spoke briefly about the blackmail by an agent of the State Security to spy on his colleagues. The local communists, who had tormented and humiliated him on a daily basis, were portrayed most negatively by the interviewee, whereas toward Enver Hoxha he only briefly expressed a

34. In communist Albania, the television was considered a luxury good and politically delicate. It cost approximately ten times the average salary, could be bought only upon the authorization of local political authorities, and became widespread only during the 1980s. Thus, in 1984, there was, statistically, approximately one television per 15 inhabitants. The distribution of televisions reflected the political hierarchy. Communists, cadres, families of veterans, of “socialist heroes,” and so on, were privileged, whereas families with “bad biographies” owned televisions only in rare instances. See: Idrizi, Idris: “Magic Apparatus” and “Window to the Foreign World”? The Impact of Television and Foreign Broadcasts on Society and State-Society Relations in Socialist Albania, in: Bönker, Kirsten/Obertreis, Julia/ Grampp, Sven (ed.): Television Beyond and Across the Iron Curtain. Newcastle upon Tyne 2016, 227-256: especially 231, 234-235.

35. Transcript no. 23, Interview with Mr. Ahmeti (born in 1958) on 3.9.2012, 2-3.

36. Ibid., 5.

37. Ibid., 7.

38. Ibid.

general antipathy.³⁹

Mr. Zefi, the grandson of a former political prisoner, presented a very similar narrative. The denial of basic rights, daily discrimination and humiliation, fear of surveillance and intrigues of the communists, but also the trouble to survive economically, were at the center of his narrative. According to him, the communists in one case had put a dead rat inside the bread that he had bought at the store, in order to provoke and humiliate him.⁴⁰ Therefore, similar to Mr. Ahmeti, Mr. Zefi focused his antipathy toward communism on the local representatives of the party-state, whereas for Enver Hoxha, a short and general negative evaluation was enough:

“For me, [Enver Hoxha] was a figure who protected his own post and his own business [interest]. [...] Here, people even lived well thanks to the Party of Labor, they even lived well. [...] Here, there were people who ate out of our sweat and hardship, for example, livestock was killed for some state holiday, and these village bigwigs took the meat that belonged to us. Here, there was a group of 6–7 people who ruled over this place, they owned the depots, they had pencil and paper in hand, they were paid well for themselves. They had their own families employed, in easy jobs.”⁴¹

The accounts of Mr. Ahmeti and Mr. Zefi cohere with our knowledge of the communist system in Albania. People with “bad biographies” were discriminated against, among other areas, in education (not being allowed to pursue higher education, or even secondary education), in work (being placed in the physically most exhausting and least paid positions and being kept far from leadership posts), in access to goods and services (from televisions and telephones to basic foodstuffs), they were excluded from awards and prizes for excellent results in school, work, military exercises, etc., and were humiliated and excluded in daily and social life.⁴² This treatment was the result of state policies, but in practice, discrimination reached to the level at which sometimes state leaders had to intervene and criticize the local communists for their extreme measures. For example, in the meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee (CC) of the PLA on 28 August 1981, Ramiz Alia presented a criticism in relation to

39. Ibid., especially 5–7, 9–10.

40. Transcript no. 9, Interview with Mr. Zefi (born in 1950) on 3.4.2012, 5, 9.

41. Ibid., 4.

42. Meanwhile, there exist a considerable number of memoirs published by former victims of political persecution. For a summary of the discriminatory practices against families with “bad biographies”, see: Kretsi, Georgia: “Good and Bad Biography.” The Concept of Family Liability in the Practice of State Domination in Socialist Albania, in: Brunnbauer, Ulf/ Helmedach, Andreas/ Troebst, Stefan (eds.): *Schnittstellen. Gesellschaft, Nation, Konflikt und Erinnerung in Südosteuropa. Festschrift für Holm Sundhaussen zum 65. Geburtstag*. Munich 2007, 175–188: especially 184.

the discrimination against a former prisoner who had not been employed after his release and therefore had to live under a bridge, noting that the local communists had practically left him solely with the options of suicide or fleeing from the country.⁴³ Nonetheless, Alia's indignation in the case at hand was related more to the fact that the former prisoner had achieved success in the second "option", fleeing.⁴⁴ In general, the communist leaders themselves actively encouraged the severe stigmatization of people with bad biographies, the discrimination and hatred toward them, and their punishment.⁴⁵

Two other interviewees of this type came from families whose political biographies had been "stained" in the late period. Mr. Ridvani belonged to a large kin, in which there were a number of communists. One of them had been expelled from the party in the years 1976–77, because he had refused to separate from his wife (with whom he had four children) after the imprisonment of her father for political reasons. Two years later, Mr. Ridvani's father had been detained and tortured for a few days, following a false accusation for bearing arms without permission. Under these conditions, but also as a consequence of watching foreign broadcasters, which portrayed life in the West as free and as having high levels of welfare, the interviewee had developed a hatred for the communist system. During his account, he recalled it as cruel and absurd, and his life at the time (especially as a young man) as stifled.⁴⁶

The biography of another interviewee, Ms. Vitore, had been "stained" in 1974, when her aunt's husband, a military officer, was imprisoned. Later, his entire family was sent to internment in the south of the country, whereas the entire kin lived in anxiety, was tracked in their every move by spies, and was systematically discriminated against and excluded. During the interview, it was clearly discernable that the experiences were painful, and that they weigh heavily on Ms. Vitore emotionally, even to this day.⁴⁷ It is worth emphasizing that, among the aspects that she criticized most in relation to communism was the class struggle, including the mechanism

43. Central State Archive of the Republic of Albania, Fund 14/ Archive of the Party, Organet udhëheqëse [The Leading Organs], 1981, dossier 131, Protocol of the Meeting of the Secretariat of the CC of the PLA on 28.8.1981, 6.

44. Ibid., 5–6.

45. See, for example, an address by the former Minister of the Interior, Hekuran Isai, in November 1983, which almost demonizes people with "bad biographies": Central State Archive of the Republic of Albania, Fund 14/ Archive of the Party, Strukturat e KQ [CC Structures], 1983, dossier 44, Address of the Minister of the Interior, Hekuran Isai, held at the activity of the PLA of the district of Durrës (dated 30.11.1983) on displays of criminality, sent to the district committees of the PLA, 2.12.1983, 56–91.

46. Transcript no. 16, Interview with Mr. Ridvani (born in 1960) on 2.8.2012.

47. Transcript no. 26, Interview with Ms. Vitoria (born in 1952) on 7.9.2012, 11–12.

of punishment on the basis of one's kin membership, whereas among the political figures, she singled out Mehmet Shehu, who she seems to have suspected was the instigator of the purges in the military sector in the first half of the 1970s.⁴⁸

Ms. Zana had been the daughter of an ("ordinary") communist, but she had married the son of a kulak. From that moment on, she began occasionally to be insulted and discriminated against as "the kulak's wife". Meanwhile, as the years went by, her husband opened up to her, telling her about the constant anxiety in which he lived, because an agent of the State Security blackmailed him to become a spy. Her husband's suffering and poverty (also a result of discrimination for reasons of his biography) are aspects that the interviewee remembered most negatively.⁴⁹

Finally, in the case of Mr. Naimi, also the son of a former party member, a hatred of communism can be observed, a hatred that likely originated from the interviewee's antipathy since the beginning of the 1980s, when, in the context of the agricultural crisis,⁵⁰ he experienced extreme poverty, while, judging from foreign media, life in the West looked to him like a paradise. In Mr. Naimi's account, the decisive role of economic conditions in legitimizing and delegitimizing the regime can be observed, as well as the decisive role of foreign media in the creation of antipathy toward communism:

"[Socialism] as a policy started well at the beginning. When poverty came, and we didn't have enough to fill our stomachs with food, then – this is known – how could we approve of his [Enver Hoxha's] policies."⁵¹

"Poverty was a great horror for us. [...] What did I care what he [Enver Hoxha] said. I thought: 'I want material goods.' What I cared about for my life, was this. Poverty put us down, it created in us the greatest hatred for the government of that time."⁵²

"After the collectivization of the cattle [...] this country was finished, we were totally finished, everyone was whacked, everyone said [thought]: 'Maybe I'll commit suicide.'"⁵³ "And here the hatred began in earnest. [...] Thank God he left us [did not collectivize] the chicken at least. When there was fried egg – honestly – I said: 'Thank God mama fried us an egg.' Maybe you don't sense it, because you didn't live through

48. Ibid., especially 8–11.

49. Transcript no. 24, Interview with Ms. Zana (born in 1962) on 5.9.2012.

50. The agricultural crisis has been analyzed in detail by: Wildermuth, Andreas: Die Krise der albanischen Landwirtschaft. Lösungsversuche der Partei- und Staatsführung unter Ramiz Alia. Nueried 1989.

51. Transcript no. 1, Interview with Mr. Naimi (born in 1964) on 2.1.2012, 15.

52. Ibid., 13.

53. Ibid., 7.

those moments.”⁵⁴

“I had faith in what the Party told us, that [outside the country] there was poverty, unemployment and this and that. Watching the foreign stations, that was how I started to come to believe that these were lies, it’s something political, something made up.”⁵⁵

Type 3: Communism as a golden period

With only one exception, none of the 35 interviewees expressed a desire still to live under the communist system, or for the communist system to return. Almost all of them expressed, at least once, directly or indirectly (for example, by criticizing the developments of the post-socialist period), nostalgia for one or a number of aspects of the past under communism. In general, the nostalgia had characteristics noted in other post-socialist countries as well. Just as, for example, Predrag Marković has observed in Serbia, so also is it the case that many contemporaries of Albanian communism seem to believe that, after its fall, important values such as solidarity, security, stability, social inclusion, sociability, seriousness, and self-esteem have been lost.⁵⁶

In a number of cases the nostalgia sharply contradicted the main narrative. Mr. Naimi, for example, whose case was analyzed within the framework of the second type, denounced the repression of human rights under communism (among others the freedom of religion, which for him, as a believer, was especially important), but at the same time, he expressed a fair amount of indignation at the “moral degeneration” of today, and he praised the “morality” under communism and even the regime’s strictness in “defending” it.⁵⁷ In the following, the appearance of nostalgia for specific aspects, such as in the case of Mr. Naimi, will be skipped over, especially when it conflicts with the basic narrative, in order to focus only on those cases (and in fact, only in the most typical ones), which have as their central narrative the portrayal, or more precisely the “defense”, of communism as a golden period at the personal and national levels.

The most typical interviewees can be divided into two subgroups with a view toward the similarity of the narratives and, up to a point, of their biographies. Mr. Hamiti and Mr. Lani, born respectively in 1942

54. Ibid., 17.

55. Ibid., 6.

56. Marković, Predrag J.: *Der Sozialismus und seine sieben “S”-Werte der Nostalgie*, in: Brunnbauer, Ulf/ Troebst, Stefan (ed.): *Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie. Die Erinnerung an den Kommunismus in Südosteuropa*. Köln, Wien, Weimar 2007, 153–164.

57. Transcript no. 1, Interview with Mr. Naimi (born in 1964) on 2.1.2012, especially 4.

and 1945, had experienced great poverty in the first years of the post-war period, and great socioeconomic changes under the communist regime. Both of them came from poor families and had benefited from opportunities offered to these classes by the state, receiving higher education and getting relatively well-paid jobs. The social prestige that they enjoyed during communism as a result of their educational, occupational, and political status (without “biographical stains”) had been devalued following the change in the system. Whereas Mr. Lani claimed a number of times during his account that he now views communism differently (at least in part critically), it is obvious that both he and Mr. Hamiti associate the period with success and satisfaction on the personal and national levels.⁵⁸ The national dimension is emphasized even more strongly. Mr. Hamiti in particular dedicates a central place to it in his account. In fact, the interviewee casts himself as a patriot who appreciated and still appreciates the communist regime, first and foremost Enver Hoxha, precisely for contributing to “the national cause”. During his entire account, a tendency can be noticed on the part of Mr. Hamiti to argue for the authenticity of the “danger from the enemy”, asserted by communist propaganda and the isolationist and militaristic policies of the regime at that time:

“The fear of war existed, it existed and it was concrete, it was not abstract. [...] Greek and Serb forces wanted to dominate us. [...] Historically, they wanted to catch [exploit] every tumult that Albania went through. Like in ’97 [1997]. In ’97, when we had riots, the Greeks wanted to change the borders. The Serbs as well, needless to say, had their own interests. [The fear of war/ danger from the enemy; I.I.] existed NOT theoretically, NO, but it existed practically [as well].”⁵⁹

“After ’44, he [Enver Hoxha] made Albania, maintained Albania. He maintained Albania as Albania, because for its entire life there were dilemmas, who will take it, how to take it, what to do to Albania. [...] Albania had two possibilities: either be taken by the Republic of Yugoslavia, or remain Albania. And it remained Albania.”⁶⁰

Occasionally, the interviewee tried to justify other aspects of the communist system as well, for example, the respect for hierarchy:

“‘Everyone must know how much he has a right to know’ was an expression of that time. Even today, there is no right to know everything. Is it your right to know what the boss does, what the director does?! You have to know how to fulfill the standards. It’s not your business what

58. Transcript no. 28, Interview with Mr. Hamiti (born in 1942) on 15.9.2012; Transcript no. 20, Interview with Mr. Lani (born in 1945) on 21.8.2012.

59. Transcript no. 28, Interview with Mr. Hamiti (born in 1942) on 15.9.2012, 2-3.

60. Ibid., 4.

anyone else does.”⁶¹

The narratives of the other four interviewees of this type are characterized by appreciation and respect for the power, strictness, and discipline of the communist regime. The proud tone in military style, as well as the dogmatic style of presenting personal opinions as objective facts, resembles the qualities of the official discourse during communism. Messrs. Qamili, Lala, and Bajrami disdained disobedience, portrayed the punishment of such disobedience as a necessary and almost helpful disciplinary measure, recalled with pride and a dose of arrogance the militarism of the time, expressed special respect for Enver Hoxha as “master of the country”, and satirized the “people,” in fact the critics of Enver Hoxha and of the communist regime, as “livestock”:

“There were some issues then, only the government dealt with them. Whoever dared to do anything [forbidden] – the laws were in force. So, if it became known that someone said something [politically forbidden], he went to prison and he got 25 years in prison, because he said ‘this bread is inedible, is this bread edible, man?!’ [...] 25 years in prison for that. You see? Skip it! No blah blah, no one steps over the government’s line!”⁶²

“We were [so strong] militarily that we lived in the forests, and we didn’t let anyone touch Albania, at that time. Now the time has come, everyone knows that ... At that time, everything was in order. [...] We were ‘soldier-people, people-soldiers.’”⁶³

“[Enver Hoxha] was our master, he was our master [...] He was the master of the country. [...] It’s hard to forget Enver Hoxha’s merits, because we have been used to that dialect, we have been used to it, we were brought up with it. It’s hard to take away Enver Hoxha’s merits, it’s hard to take them away, but now the time has come, they say ‘the people were’ ... ‘the livestock woke up.’”⁶⁴

From the account of the three interviewees cited above, who insisted on speaking only together as a group, it is impossible to clearly identify the motives for the positive memories, since – in contrast to the others – they revealed very little about their lives, experiences, and perspectives, and in some cases they did not even answer the questions. In general, it can be noticed that the fundamental norms of the political culture of communism, such as homogeneity, harsh punishment of deviance, discipline and obedience, and respect for hierarchy, cohered with their convictions and their mentality. The case of another interviewee with a

61. Ibid., 5.

62. Transcript no. 3/1, Interview with Mr. Qamili (born in 1938) on 11.3.2012, 6.

63. Transcript no. 3/3, Interview with Mr. Bajrami (born in 1940) on 11.3.2012, 4.

64. Transcript no. 3/2, Interview with Mr. Lala (born in 1935) on 11.3.2012, 6.

similar narrative, that of Mr. Hasani, nonetheless revealed how diverse and surprising the motives for retrospectively glorifying communism could be. The interviewee explained at length his appreciation for the policies of the communist regime and its qualities, such as strictness and decisiveness, but then, later, he told of two events that push the interpretation of his narrative in another direction. In the first, he had been a witness to the provocation of another villager by local communists in collaboration with the State Security, and to his immediate arrest on site, under the accusation of “agitation and propaganda against the state”. The second case was related to his brother-in-law’s fleeing to a foreign country. The interviewee was later interrogated by internal affairs authorities and lived daily with the fear that he might be condemned to internment as a family member.⁶⁵ While it cannot be determined whether these two experiences were eventually traumatic for him, the fact that his family in the end “nonetheless” was not punished seems to have aroused in Mr. Hasani a feeling of gratitude to the regime and to have reinforced his political loyalty and conformity.⁶⁶

Conclusions

The interviews analyzed in this article demonstrate the diversity in the ways in which communism, especially its late period, is privately remembered in Albania more than two decades after the fall of the regime; in the motives of the witnesses of the time for interpreting it retrospectively in one or another form; as well as in their experiences of the system of that time. In fact, the latter are a key to understanding the memory of communism, even though the influence of experiences and discourses after the change in the system are undoubtedly significant. A large segment of the population, especially those born and socialized under communism, internalized and habituated the basic norms of the

65. The internment of the family members of escapees was provided for in Article 2 of the legal decree below, which in any case left room for interpretation regarding whether Mr. Hasani and his family were considered (close) family members of the escapee: *Official Gazette* (1979), no. 2, Decree no. 5912, dated 26.6.1979: On internment and expulsion as an administrative measure, 42–44: 42.

66. Georgia Kretsi, who has conducted interviews in the south of Albania and has published one of the richest and solid analyses, from the theoretical-methodological perspective, on the memory of communist political persecution, has encountered a similar narrative, which she interprets as, among other things, a transformation of the perception of violence and punishment on the part of the contemporary witness and an internalization of the idea of just punishment and legitimate violence: Kretsi: “Good and Bad biography,” 177–178. The findings of Kretsi’s study have been published in a more extensive monograph form in: Kretsi, Georgia: *Verfolgung und Gedächtnis in Albanien. Eine Analyse postsozialistischer Erinnerungsstrategien*. Wiesbaden 2007.

system and therefore remember the latter, especially the late period, with a tone of indifference as something that was simply normal, and in no way abnormal. Former victims of political persecution, who suffered severe and systematic discrimination and who lived in the fear of being arrested at any time, under the pressure of constant surveillance, and with the worry of whether they would manage to survive economically, remember this period in a deeply negative way. In this group are also contemporaries, the biography of whom had been “stained” only in the late period, as well as young people of the time who, also due to their watching foreign stations, felt increasingly oppressed and wretched under the communist regime. In any case, the selection of aspects and figures that they remember negatively varies significantly and widely depends from their life path and individual experiences.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, contemporaries who had experienced large socioeconomic changes after the war, and also had benefited from opportunities offered by the communist regime, climbing the ladder of social prestige, associated and still associate this period first and foremost with success, pride, and power. Nonetheless, a careful analysis and a detailed knowledge of the life histories of the interviewees are necessary in order to better shed light on their motives. In general, the narratives are characterized by numerous contradictions and surprising turns. Even though the focus of this study was not the class of former political prisoners, many interviewees, during their accounts, were confronted with painful, in some cases traumatic, and often humiliating memories. This shows the importance of multidisciplinary projects that include professional psychologists. In any case, if they are taken seriously and studied in a methodologically and theoretically sound manner, memories hold extraordinarily great value in understanding both communism and post-communism in Albania.

67. Cf. Brunnbauer, Ulf: Staat und Gesellschaft im Realsozialismus. Legitimitätsstrategien kommunistischer Herrschaft in Südosteuropa, in: Grigore, Mihai-D./ Dinu, Radu Harald/ Živojinović, Marc (eds.): Herrschaft in Südosteuropa. Kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven. Göttingen 2012, 21–52: 30.

Photography and Remembrance

Questioning the Visual Legacy of Communist Albania

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Countless photographs were produced during the communist period in Albania. Many of them were designed to create archives and to preserve the memory of places, people and times in which and by which the new type of society wanted by the authorities was realized. The task of the photographers was indeed to record and document the transformations of the country or, in the words of the time, the “construction of socialism”. It was also, for some of them, to offer everyone the opportunity to create photographic memories. In any case, one can hypothesize that the feeling of living in a time of profound transformations in which ancient places and lifestyles disappeared in favor of more “modern” forms gave a particular importance to photography. As a technical process related to industrialization, photography has a significant relationship to modernization. It also has the property to fix particular moments (in Albanian, as in other languages, the verb *fiksoj* is frequently used to describe the activity of the photographers) whose serialization gives an idea, an “evidence”, of the time passing by and, in this case, of the progress made. The juxtaposition, in the layout of the journals of the communist era, of two images with the caption “before” and “after”, or “yesterday” and “today”, is thus particularly frequent to mark both the change and its orientation.

By their style as well as by the motives they repeat, these images belong to the visual world of communism: through *them* the communist period in Albania is close to other communist experiences and can be compared to *them*. By *them*, any recollection of the communist period can be based on visual models or, on the contrary, oppose and reject *them*. Whether it arouses nostalgia or rejection, photography rarely means “apathy”. The images of the communist period are, probably for this reason, frequently reproduced today: in the press, where they illustrate the supposed revelations drawn from archives; in autobiographical works, where they accompany the stories and testimonies; in social networks and on the walls of houses, where they recall the stages of individual trajectories. As suggested by Rob Kroes more generally, “our contemporary sense of history is replete with photographic memories” (Kroes 2007: 4). Whether

we have had direct experience or not, our mental images of the communist period in Albania do not escape this hold of photography.

However, it is striking that there is no or extremely rare reflection on the link between these photographs and the memory of communism. To what extent do these images constitute a memory of communism? How do they participate today in the remembrance of this period? It is difficult to find answers to these questions in the existing literature. First, as the history of photography in Albania becomes more known, we see that the communist period occupies a marginal and neglected place: photography is said to have had an instrumental status in the hands of political power and thus to be of little value compared to that which had been produced during the previous period. “The strict political-economic limitations so also gradually constrained the scope of art photography”, writes one of the few historians of Albanian photography (Vrioni 2009: 44). This also explains why the rare publications devoted to photography in the communist period do not address the issue of memory. This is true of academic studies when they are interested in how propaganda worked (Vorpsi 2014), as of photographic albums illustrating the production of this or that photographer (Kumi 2013). It is therefore difficult to have an overview of the production methods and uses of photography during the communist period. On the other hand, studies on the memory of communism in Albania have little interest in the role of photography in the formation and transmission of this memory, even when they make explicit reference to visual anthropology (Kati 2015). In this, they are similar to some classic works of sociology and philosophy of memory in which photography is barely mentioned (Halbwachs 1994, Ricœur 2000).

However, there has been a continuous interest in the social sciences for the last twenty years in the relationship between photography and memory, and studies from a variety of disciplinary horizons make it possible to go beyond the mere affirmation of a particularly strong link between photography and memory (Hirsch 1997, Kuhn, McAllister 2006, Kroes 2007, Shevchenko 2014). This body of research, however, favors western and postcolonial contexts and, with a few exceptions (Sarkisova, Shevchenko 2014, Skopin 2015), hardly concerns the communist world. In what follows, I will seek, on the basis of these works, to show why and how taking photography into account can enrich our knowledge and our understanding of the memory of communism in Albania.

1. Why consider photography?

It is not necessary to assume an essential link between memory and photography to recognize that the latter is a medium for recollection and that it is an extremely common mnemonic tool. Photography makes us remember. This is one of the reasons behind family photography, whose diffusion during the communist period is unprecedented in Albania. Largely reserved for the urban middle and upper classes until the Second World War, the family function of photography became accessible to a very large part of the population, including in remote rural areas, with the establishment of the so-called “public service” photography in the 1960s (de Rapper, Durand 2017a). As a result, there are few families who do not possess at least a few photographs, often of diverse origins: photographic souvenirs taken by “nature” photographers (*fotografët e natyrës*), wedding photographs, identity photographs, school photographs or “emulation” photographs (*fotografi e emulacionit*). Many of these photographs expressly respond to a need to keep “souvenirs” (*kujtim*) as evidenced by the frequency of the mention, printed or handwritten, of the word “souvenir” on the prints (fig. 1–4). Both the frequency of the term and the insistence of its association with the image, however, seem to show, like locks of hair or other personal relics that accompany, in other contexts, personal photographs (Batchen 2004), that the image alone is not enough to hold the memory and thus testify to “a persistent anxiety and fear of being forgotten, rather than a comfortable taken-for-granted assumption that a photograph ensures lasting personal memory” (Shevchenko 2015: 273).



Fig. 1: Tirana, 1962 (private collection).



Fig.2: Devoll, around 1980 (private collection).

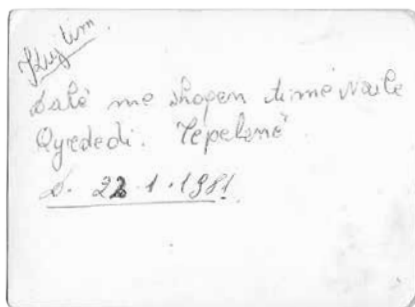


Fig.3: Lunxhëri, 1981 (private collection).



Fig.4: Shpat, 1990 (private collection).

The memorial function of photography is, on the other hand, not limited to the family sphere, and much of the official or institutional photography (that which was designated as “propaganda photography”) is also part of the desire to fix and preserve memories. The activity of the members of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor was thus the object each year of photographic albums whose relationship with the family albums can easily be shown, as on these images of the reception of a Bulgarian delegation to Tirana in 1957 (fig. 5): group photographs in front of the house, commensal and dance scenes are among the most frequent images of family photography.



Fig.5: Tirana, 1957 (AQSH).

It is also revealing that the death of Enver Hoxha in April 1985 resulted in the publication of photographs called “souvenirs”, such as the one published and commented in *Ylli* magazine in May of that year (fig. 6). In the image, the Hoxha couple appears in the middle of smiling photographers and journalists and the photograph is captioned: “unforgettable memory” (*kujtim i paharruar*). The death of the leader thus arouses in the public sphere the same type of reaction as, in the private sphere, the death of a loved one: the photographs of the deceased are sought for and looked at in an attempt not to lose him or her completely. We know that such an experiment is at the origin of one of the most cited books in photography studies Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, written after the death of the author’s mother (Barthes 1980).



Fig.6: *Ylli*, April 1985, p.29.

The function of memory can lead to the preservation as well as the destruction of photographs. During the communist period, many photographs were destroyed because they were likely to recall unwanted memories (even if mutilation seems to be a very common mode of action). However, it was at the fall of the single party rule, in 1991, and later during the troubles of the year 1997 that much of the destruction of photographs seems to have taken place. Nevertheless, a large number of photographs survived, whether in institutional or in private archives. These images are still available as a medium of memory and it is likely that they will remain when the last direct witnesses of the communist period are gone. One can see, therefore, a certain urgency to preserve and document the photographs of the communist period as long as their authors or the persons represented in them can still talk about these remaining photographs.

It is necessary to point out a widely recognized property of photography in the social sciences, which is that of stimulating speech. Photography calls for commentary and storytelling; for this reason it has long been used in interview situations because it frees the voice of those interviewed and provokes a story different from that produced by only oral questions. This is called “photo elicitation” (Collier and Collier 1986; Harper 2012). It should be added that this work of recollection and producing a narrative based on photography is often a collective one. Through it individual memories come together and contribute to a shared elaboration of memory. As Anne Muxel writes about family photographs, “photographs always convey a proposal for a narrative, a version, more or less official and consensual, of the common history” (Muxel 1996: 175). Photography can therefore be used to help the voicing of a memory, or rather, the voicing of the more or less shared and more or less conflicting memories of the communist period.

The second reason why it is important to take photography into account is that the images that we have inherited do not only facilitate the remembrance, in the present, of the communist past, they also reveal the way individuals and institutions have fabricated representations of Communist Albania, its present, past and future. The interest in the photographs of the communist period is thus also an interest in the politics of memory and representation in use at that time. And one can think that the way in which the memory of the communist period is transmitted today is partly determined by the way in which memories have been fixed or constructed at that time. Photography is both the object and the agent of this “stranglehold on memory” (*mainmise sur la mémoire*), to use an ex-

pression of Tzvetan Todorov (Todorov 2000: 167). If many photographs have been destroyed or falsified as traces of an undesirable past (this is the case of photographs taken before the end of the Second World War and testifying to “bourgeois” frequentations or ways of life, but also of many others during the political crises during which new “enemies” were designated), then individuals and institutions were building a photographic archive that would become the memory of the communist period in the future. Photography is thus a concrete example of how the present recollection of communism is based on the making of memory during the communist period. Unlike other objects or places that today serve as memorabilia (objects of everyday consumption, camps and prisons) but were not designed as such, photography has had, from its conception, a memorial function.

The photographic collections that have come to us then raise a number of questions, of which I present only an overview. In addition to what has been photographed and whose image has been preserved, we must look at what was not photographed or at what the images do not show. Contrary to a popular belief, photography is not a faithful or exhaustive image of reality: it is the result of cutting, selection and construction. It must be remembered here that the doctrine of socialist realism was applied to photography as to other visual or written productions, and that it remained in force until the end of the communist period. To the photographers’ testimony, this meant above all showing “happy people at work” and avoiding any divergent representation (poverty, inequalities, conflicts, misfortune). It is thus easy to see from the photography of the press what the “obsessions of the regime” were at that time (Durand, de Rapper 2012: 15–37): industrialization, abundance of harvests, people in arms for the defense of the fatherland, cult of the leader and heroes. On the other hand, one might wonder what the role of censorship, and even more so of self-censorship, was in the production and preservation of photographs. The realization of photographs did not depend solely on technical constraints and aesthetic choices. It was also subject to a political evaluation of what could be photographed and was actually photographed: hence the many restrictions imposed on photographers, professionals or amateurs, and the destruction or mutilation of photographs (Nathanaili 2017). The study of photography is thus a way to observe and explain the functioning of censorship and self-censorship in that context.

In connection with the delimitation of what could be photographed, one can also wonder if photography only gave the image of a memorable present, or if it also gave that of a desired future. Such ambivalence has

been shown with family photography in other contexts (Hirsch 1997, Kroes 2007) and is undoubtedly found in some family photographs of communist Albania depicting marital and family happiness as a promise or expectation. The *raison d'être* of the photography of the press, however, seems to be also to bring through the image of a desired world, that of a harmonious and orderly socialist society. One can thus make the hypothesis of an overrepresentation, in these images, of the city and of the urban lifestyles in a country still largely rural.

The question of the visual fabrication of the memory of the construction of socialism finally raises the question of the status of photography in the politics of representation: what was the role of photography vis-à-vis other media or forms of representation? What were the expectations of photography and to what extent were they satisfied or not? These questions take on particular importance when we look at the changes that have taken place since 1991, particularly with the omnipresence of television and the digital revolution. The images of communist Albania thus provide an opportunity to reconstitute a “regional moment of photography” (Beaugé, Pelen 1995: 10), that is the adaptation or domestication of the technology of photography in a particular historical context.

2. How to consider photography?

A complex phenomenon, photography can be approached from various points of view and it is not my intention to impose an approach to the detriment of others. I would like here only to give some hints inspired by my experience as an anthropologist working with photography produced during the communist period in Albania as an object of research. To make photography an object of research means at the same time to go beyond its use as a tool or technique of research (either to record facts observed on the ground, or to make people talk about their lives) and its use as a simple source granting access to various aspects of social life at the time the picture was taken. In recent years, a growing number of anthropological works have thus taken photography as an object of research in different contexts. The concept of “ethnography of photography”, or “photographic practices”, defines them relatively well and I will first focus on what this approach consists of. In the case of communist Albania, photography must also be considered simultaneously as a historical object, produced from a certain period, and in its present state, as an image of the past in the present. This requires deepening the way

in which the study of photography is articulated with that of memory, which I will try to do in the next step.

The ethnography of photography can be defined as the observation and analysis of relationships between people and photographs (Wright 2013: 17). This assumes first of all not to limit the photographic act to the relation between a photographer and his model, nor to that between an image and a spectator, but to open it to all the people involved in the production and consumption of an image or set of images. Faced with a photograph of the communist period, it is first of all necessary to ask what the places, the people and the events represented are. It is also necessary to ask what relationship the subjects had with the photographer and with those who commissioned, possessed, transmitted, watched, commented and possibly modified or destroyed the photograph. In the case of Albania, this determination of the “context” or, to use James Hevia’s expression, the “photography complex” (Hevia 2009), is all the more necessary since photographic practice was rarely a private and harmless activity. On the contrary, photography from that period implied a plurality of agents and institutions and took place within political, ideological, moral and technical constraints that must be reconstructed to explain how a particular photograph was produced at a given moment, and how it reached us.

Photography then should be considered as an object as much as an image, that is, in its materiality. Such an approach can make use of the notions of “social life” or “cultural biography” (Kopytoff 1986) to trace the different interactions that a photograph has with different agents from its conception to its disappearance. This means that, in the presence of a photograph of the communist period, whether it belongs to private or public funds, we should ask about its trajectory as a material object, the expectations to which it responds as well as the uses of which it is the object. The “material turn” has affected the anthropological study of photography as other fields of social research, and the physical presence of photographs is now considered along with their iconic content (Edwards, Hart 2004). Deborah Poole’s notion of “visual economy” about the flow of images between Andean America and Europe has also allowed to revisit the older notion of “visual culture” by emphasizing both the circulation and the changing value of photographs according to the context of their reception (Poole 1997).

Finally, the ethnography of photography is attentive to the articulation between images and narratives. It is a question of making people talk from photographs, as in photo elicitation, but more specifically by looking at the way in which a particular image gives rise to a particular

story. It is also possible to reconstruct a narrative in the absence of oral commentary, by the mere arrangement of the photographs, as in the case of family albums (Langford 2001).

Such an approach is the condition for going beyond the hasty interpretations of the photographs of the communist period (e.g. as carrying a simple political message) and understanding their emotional value. It also helps to better understand the role and effects of photography on the remembrance of communism.

Several recent works have focused on the relationship between photography and memory by attempting to go beyond the common-sense assumption that photography is a form of memory, that it creates and preserves “memories” in a manner similar to human memory. In a context of questioning the memory of communism in Albania, it seems indeed important to understand the role and the effects of photography on the emergence and reception of discourses and memorial practices. In other words, it is necessary to place photography in memory studies, as Olga Shevchenko invites us to do (2015).

Within these works, we can distinguish two orientations: one that highlights a particular link to time that distinguishes photography from other forms of representation and the other that is interested in the way photography is used in memorial practices. This distinction more generally overlaps that between essentialist and contextualist approaches to photography, the former focusing on the particularities and irreducibility of the photographic medium and the latter on the determination of photographic practices and their meaning by the context in which they occur (Strassler 2010: 19, Shevchenko 2015: 278). However, these two approaches should not be viewed as conflicting or incompatible, but rather as the two poles of a continuum. In one case, the photograph is a trace of what has been: it authenticates, or certifies, that something had previously existed within the view of the camera, something which is no longer there. It makes visible the passage of time; it evokes death; and is intrinsically linked to nostalgia (Sontag 1979, Barthes 1980). In the other case, each photograph is the result of a device that imposes a vision; this vision is not transparent or naturally recorded by the camera, rather it is produced by an apparatus (Tagg 1988).

The current reception of photographs from the communist era generally combines these two conceptions: the constrained and limited nature of the photographic act is often evoked (for example in the case of identity photographs or the prohibition of “foreign appearances”; see also the testimony of Ylli Demneri in Demneri 2011: 9–10), but this is not

enough to reject any idea of authenticity or emotional value. This ambivalence invites us to relativize the approaches which are limited to seeing communist-era photography as an instrument of domination in the hands of power, thus privileging the institutional aspect of photography. It also invites us to relativize those approaches which favor the private dimension of photography by seeing the testimony of individual experience which can now be recalled via a nostalgic mode.

In fact, the very distinction between institutional (or public) and private memory is blurred by the visual economy of communist Albania first because the majority of private photographs were made in the framework of a public organization, that of “public service photography”. This means that their authors were photographers who were trained and employed by the state and who used state-provided material. These photographers could work at home, but, in most cases, they operated within the public space: hence the relative rarity of representations of the private space in these photographs. On the contrary, public activities (official ceremonies, festivals, schooling and work in general) were very widely represented. Most of the images kept in families thus have a public origin, even if their uses are also private. There is also, as we have noted above, a proximity of the models used in family photography and institutional photography, especially when they solemnize the group around a figure of authority. Finally, images circulate and take on new meanings in this circulation: identity photographs, of institutional origin, become funerary photographs; family photographs can be exhibited in local museums for their exemplary nature, or on the contrary, pose a threat to families in the event of arrest (de Rapper, Durand 2011).

The following image is an example of this entanglement of the public and private (fig. 7). At first glance, it is a family photograph. People who are standing or sitting around the table laden with food are smiling and at least some of them are probably linked by family relationships. It is indeed preserved today in a family, among other family memories, by people who recognize themselves and recall the event fixed on the image. However, it is a very official image; its author is a state photographer from the nearby city (the only one with a flash for shooting indoors) and the occasion is an institutional activity. Several of the guests at the table are members of a delegation from the party’s regional structure who came to visit the cooperative farm and stayed overnight with families from village. Photographs made on such occasions were printed in multiple copies and sent to the various participants.



Fig. 7: Devoll, 1980 (private collection).

Such examples also show that the current interpretation of photographs is open and that the reasons for taking a photograph may be secondary when viewed in another context. The notion of the “optical unconscious” proposed by Walter Benjamin, like the distinction between *studium* and *punctum* introduced by Roland Barthes, can be recalled here. For Walter Benjamin, photography has the characteristic of being able to record aspects of reality that we do not perceive consciously and that only appear to us when we are viewing a photograph (2012: 18). Similarly, Roland Barthes proposes two levels of interpretation of a photograph (Barthes 1980: 48–49). The first, the *studium*, is based on the knowledge that one has of the conditions of the photograph’s production and those that one can be drawn from it.

There is *studium* in this image taken at a border village in southern Albania and dating from the early 1980s (fig. 8). It shows the members of the “defense brigade” (*brigada e mbrojtjes*) of the cooperative farm, who were responsible for the maintenance of bunkers and defensive works, receiving the instructions of the day from the brigadier, who is standing to the right of the image. Taken by a public service photographer who came to document the activities of the cooperative farm, this image provides information on the life in a border area as well as on the function of photography (a public service photographer asks workers to pose as a propaganda photographer would do). However, when I showed this picture to a friend in the neighboring town, his first reaction was to point out a detail that had remained unnoticed by me and others, but that struck him: only the brigadier wore shoes; the other men were wearing boots. He saw this as a mark of the brigadier’s privileged position, as someone

who would not take part in physical work with the brigade members. This is the *punctum*, as Roland Barthes understands it, which is something that touches us, or draws us to a photograph, regardless of the knowledge it can bring us.



Fig. 8: Devoll, 1980 (private collection).

A last point allows us to introduce a possible specificity of the photography of Communist Albania. In the history of photography, and more specifically in the history of the relationship between photography and memory, the snapshot represents an important step. As Olga Shevchenko writes, “In an era of anxiety over memory, the snapshot (...) is offered as an insurance against memory’s inherent failings, and an antidote to the passage of time” (Shevchenko 2015: 275). Yet it seems that instant photography was rare in communist Albania, both in family photography and in propaganda photography. The pose dominates, but only a technical explanation is not enough as the cameras and film used especially by propaganda photographers had the ability to capture moving objects. Technical knowledge also existed, as evidenced by an article published in the magazine *Ylli* in July 1970 for amateurs who wanted to photograph moving objects. In fact, the attraction for the snapshot is found among amateur photographers; it is even a distinctive feature of this category of photographers (de Rapper, Durand 2017b). The depreciation of the snapshot in favor of the pose could support the hypothesis that what is sought in photography is not the memory of the moment lived, that of a personal history, but rather the memory of a normative history, or a history of conformity to certain models, an inherently collective history.

This peculiarity allows us to highlight several levels of memory and

to wonder about the extent to which photographic memory can be a “shared memory”. We can indeed see the effect of a “metamemory”, or a conscious memory, as defined by Joël Candau. “Metamemory is a memory claimed, ostensive. (...) in its collective form, it is the shared claim of a memory supposed to be shared” (Candau 2005: 78–79). The predominant and collective nature of photography in communist Albania would thus respond to the desire to create and affirm a shared memory of the “construction of socialism”. As Denis Skopin recalls, group photography was a popular genre in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era, and the same might well be true in Enver Hoxha’s Albania (Skopin 2015).

But the pose also reveals another level of memory, that of the “protomemory”, an incorporated, unconscious memory visible, for example, in the postures adopted in front of the camera (Candau 2005: 77–78). The following two photographs show how the norms of self-presentation and those of the representation of others can be incorporated (fig. 9–10). They represent the same young man, one year apart and in two different places. They were taken by two different photographers. The similarities are nonetheless striking: in the posture of the subject, the way he faces the camera as well as in the framing and viewing angle adopted by the two photographers. Moreover, in both cases, the background is occupied by a political symbol: the seat of the Tirana Party Committee, and a poster supporting *aksion*, or the volunteer work campaigns. The examination of the different corpuses, both of family photography and of propaganda photography, would also reveal other constants of this type. The question, then, is how, in the communist era as today, individual memory is articulated with protomemory and metamemory as produced by the photographic conditions of communist Albania.



Fig.9: Tiranë, 1976 (private collection).



Fig.10: Berat, 1977 (private collection).

I have sought here to show the interest of a greater consideration of photography in the reflection on remembrance of the communist period in Albania and to indicate some directions of research. The work remaining to be done in this field is immense: it is at the same time a work of collection, documentation and preservation of the photographic funds, public or private, and a work of technical, iconographic, historical and anthropological analysis. This is all the more necessary as these funds are, in a certain way, still alive and always “active”. In today’s Albania, following the fall of communism, these photographs are involved in heritagization processes as well as in memory conflicts. These photographs are also involved in what Harald Wydra calls the “democratization of memory” in post-communist societies (Wydra 2015: 202): these images are always re-interpretable and can support multiple histories and conflicting narratives. Like memory, photography is not fixed once and for all, it is continuously built in the present.

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Albania's Relations with the Soviet Union and Their Traces in Individual and Collective Memory

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Introduction

Before World War II, the relations between Albania and the Soviet Union were at minimal levels. However, the postwar period repositioned the spheres of influence of the Great Powers in the Balkans, and Albania would incline toward the creation of close relations with the Soviet Union and other countries in the communist bloc. After the joint declaration of 22 December 1944 by the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States, by which they recognized the war of the Albanian people against Nazi-fascism and gave their guarantee for preserving its independence, the path was opened for the establishment of diplomatic relations. "Thus, on 10 November 1945, the Head of the Soviet Army Mission presents to the Prime Minister of the P.R. of Albania, Enver Hoxha, a note from the Soviet Government concerning its readiness to recognize the Albanian Government without conditions."¹ A few days later, Chuvakhin was accredited to the Albanian Government as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USSR, whereas Koço Tashko was sent to Moscow in the same capacity. However, relations between the two countries would not become direct until 1948, due to the fact that the interpreter of our country's foreign policy was Yugoslavia. The Tito-Stalin split in 1948 opened the way for Albania to establish more intensive relations with the Soviet Union. The relationship between the two countries, which lasted for more than a decade, was characterized by a close friendship in the early years and numerous disagreements in the later years. This article aims to bring out the causes of the break of the relationship between the two countries and the traces that this event, important at that time, has left in individual and collective memory.

1. AMPJ, F 151, 1944, Dossier 44, p. 25.

Albania and the Soviet Union, through friendship and opposition

Albanian-Soviet relations during the years 1948–1961 were characterized by a multifaceted cooperation. The Soviet influence could be seen in every aspect of life, from political and economic organization to social, cultural, and educational aspects. This intensive relationship created between the two countries after 1948 would not pass without leaving an imprint on the worldviews and the lives of ordinary people as well.

The death of Stalin on 5 March 1953 would be considered in Albania as a great misfortune for the communist camp. There were long addresses by members of the Politburo in honor of him as a figure, just as overflowing newspaper headlines about the alleged great aid that Stalin had given to “our country” and the entire communist camp. As noted by an interviewee, “the press trumpeted this event. In newspaper headlines it was always written that the friendship between the Soviet Union was the cornerstone of all of our victories, and as a matter of fact, everything that had been built was built with aid coming from the Soviet Union. My village was a remote one where newspapers were not delivered; we received news from other villages. Songs were sung for Stalin even by the elderly members of our village.”² Stalin was considered a great leader, and he was esteemed as a figure even by ordinary people. “In school we had portraits not only of Enver but also of Stalin; the day he died was a day of great mourning; we felt very bad and thought about the help that came from the Soviet Union.”³ Another witness from that time also confirmed the strong impression this event had left on him: “The teacher came into the class and told us that Father Stalin had died; the teacher cried, and we also cried; we really felt bad because we loved him and we had been brought up with that attitude and that worldview.”⁴

A few months after the death of Stalin, in August of 1953, “the Soviet Government and the Government of the People’s Republic of Albania decided to promote to the embassy level the Mission of the U.S.S.R. in Tirana and the Legation of the People’s Republic of Albania in Moscow, respectively.”⁵ Lyovychkin was appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Soviet Union in Tirana. Even though relations were promoted to the level of embassies, the death of Stalin would not pass without leaving an imprint on Albanian-Soviet relations, and it would

2. Transcript, “Qemal”, interviewed by B. Lala on 24 August 2017.

3. Transcript, “Nebi”, interviewed by B. Lala on 21 October 2017.

4. Transcript, “Ramazan”, interviewed by B. Lala on 24 August 2017.

5. Zëri i Popullit, 4 August 1953, p. 3.

not be long before problems between the two countries became evident. At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR, in 1956, Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, announced plans to reform the Soviet Union's domestic and foreign policy. These changes would also be reflected in the policy that the other countries of the communist bloc would pursue from then on. Along these lines, in domestic policy Khrushchev began the process of de-Stalinizing the country, criticizing the cult of personality and dissolving Stalin's personal secretariat. Enver Hoxha tried to adapt to the policy pursued by Khrushchev, and therefore, imitating the Soviet example, he also initiated a policy against "bureaucratization" and the "cult of personality." Thus, at the Third Congress of the Party of Labour of Albania in Tirana, Hoxha would declare that: "The Party of Labour of Albania and the entire Albanian people fully approve of the historic and rightful decisions of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and consider these decisions not only an excellent victory of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but also a great victory for the Party of Labour and for the Albanian people."⁶ Thus, the Albanian leaders found themselves criticizing the cult of personality and supporting the policy adopted by Khrushchev. "Albanian leaders did not have much choice other than to adapt to the new course following the death of Stalin in 1953, but they did so slowly and with hesitation, because, it seems, they were afraid that every change would become an impediment to the control that the party had managed to establish in the country."⁷

Even though these changes, according to propaganda, were necessary for the building up of socialism, Hoxha feared that his position within the Party of Labour of Albania might be shaken; therefore, he did not hesitate to exploit this situation to further his personal interests and denounce those persons that, according to him, had abused their posts. An interviewee stated that: "when Khrushchev denounced the cult of personality, we began to draw our own comparisons, because Enver Hoxha held four functions, and this was a cult of personality. Everyone turned out to be enemy, even those with whom he fought on the same side and for the same ideals. He considered them to be enemies, starting with Mustafa Gjinishi, Sejfulla Malëshova, Tuk Jakova, etc. Even though we had these thoughts, we kept these things in us, because we didn't dare to speak out."⁸

6. Zëri i Popullit, 27 May 1956, p. 8.

7. CIA Documents. Soviet-Albanian Relations (1962):

http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/14/esau-19.pdf, p. 5.

8. Transcript, "Ramazan", interviewed by B. Lala on 24 August 2017.

The dissatisfaction of the Albanian regime toward the Soviet leadership concerned not only domestic policy, but also the foreign policy that Khrushchev pursued in the later years. However, the Albanian leaders could not oppose the changes that Moscow was pursuing, as without the Soviet Union they would be isolated, without allies in the international arena, without credit and economic aid. Khrushchev himself would write in his memoirs: “Albania was forced to agree with us – not because we had convinced its leaders but because they had no choice.”⁹ Even his Albanian counterpart, Enver Hoxha, would recall years later in his memoirs: “Khrushchev and his band were increasing the pressure on us in the economic sphere every day more. They not only denied us the aid that we asked for, but the aid they did give us was completely inadequate.”¹⁰

In the event that he would be forced to leave the Soviet orbit, Hoxha needed first to find a power that would be able not only to defend Albania against the Soviet threat, but also to secure it economic aid. In 1956, Hoxha knew that immediately breaking off relations with the Soviet Union would provoke the reaction of Khrushchev, who had shown that he would not tolerate changes that would threaten the unity of the socialist bloc. Despite the dissatisfactions that existed between the two sides, in 1959 there was an impression that the communist bloc was more unified than ever, and that relations between the two countries had reached their peak. The confirmation of Khrushchev’s visit to Albania for the period 26 May – 6 June 1959 reinforced this idea even further. However, contradictions existed, and thus both sides were careful in their talks not to broach any sensitive matters. “The Soviet delegation, for understandable reasons, will not, in its statements, touch the Yugoslav issue, and we hope that our Albanian friends, in their statements, will take due account of this fact”¹¹ reads the report sent from Moscow to Tirana a few days before the visit. The Albanian government took immediate measures to prepare to welcome the Soviet delegation; thus, individuals were selected to hold speeches during the event, it was decided how the press would cover the visit, it was ordered that roads be decorated with the flags of the two countries and that photos of the Albanian and Soviet leaders would be placed everywhere.

On 25 May 1959, a Soviet delegation, comprising Nikita S. Khrushchev, Minister of Defense P. Malinovsky, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs N.P. Firyubin (former Soviet ambassador), along with a number

9. Sergei Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev. Vol. 3: Statesman 1953-1964*. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007, p. 513.

10. Enver Hoxha, *Hrushovianët*. Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1980, p. 362.

11. AQSH, F. 14, 1959, Dossier 18, p. 6.

of other distinguished figures in the Soviet Union, arrived in Tirana. A magnificent welcome was arranged for the Soviet delegation, the Albanian leadership was enthused by the visit, and the entire population had poured into the streets to greet them. Such an event could not transpire without leaving an impression on the witnesses of the time, one of whom remembers: “That day I was leaving to transport milk into Tirana. Khrushchev was welcomed with a great ceremony by the entire population. The line of cars was long; we had never seen so many cars.”¹² It was the first time that such a high-level figure visited our country, and although “we organized for the welcome and it was a great event, we did not have the same fondness for Khrushchev as we did for Stalin.”¹³ It was anticipated that Khrushchev would remain in Albania for 12 days, and his agenda was filled with visits and meetings with the people. At first sight, the visit was very enthusiastic, but at its root, it was challenging. As a witness from the time recalls, they had been ordered to go to the city of Durrës to welcome Khrushchev: “I remember applauding loudly, but not my friend; he only applauded politely.”¹⁴

The Soviet delegation left Albania feeling satisfied, as Khrushchev would recall in his memoirs. “For the entire time we stayed in Albania, our delegation was satisfied. The discussions that we had were without a doubt friendly, and we returned home in good humor and with positive opinions about Albania’s achievements.”¹⁵ On the other side, Hoxha started to oppose the Soviets, but only after he ensured that he had a powerful ally that would guarantee the economic support that Albania needed. “Despite ideological disagreements, it was Moscow’s failed efforts at economic pressure that drove Albania toward an unequal alliance with China.”¹⁶ In 1956, Enver Hoxha visited Beijing, where the Chinese Government promised him that it would provide him with the help that Albanians needed.

“The problems brought forth by the communist movement were analyzed in a meeting of representatives of communist and labor parties from socialist countries, organized in Bucharest in June 1960, on the occasion of the Third Congress of the Romanian Labor Party.”¹⁷ As a matter of fact, “Beijing, not Tirana, was the place that initiated the split

12. Transcript, “Nebi”, interviewed by B. Lala on 21 October 2017.

13. Transcript, “Ramazan”, interviewed by B. Lala on 24 August 2017.

14. Transcript, “Qemal”, interviewed by B. Lala on 24 August 2017.

15. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, p. 518.

16. Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split. Cold War in the Communist World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 204.

17. Xhelal Gjeçovi (ed), *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar. Volume 4: Shqiptarët gjatë Luftës së Dytë Botërore dhe pas saj, 1939-1990*. Tiranë: Toena, 2008, p. 248.

with Moscow in June 1960; then, the only thing left to Hoxha was to show his true colors”¹⁸ and to choose which path he would take. Albania’s representative at this meeting, Hysni Kapo, received orders to oppose Khrushchev openly and to support China, Albania’s new ally. Khrushchev writes in his memoirs: “I do not quite remember the name of the Albanian representative in Bucharest. But I asked him: ‘What is happening?’ He replied: ‘Comrade Khrushchev, I do not understand anything myself. But I have received orders to support China.’”¹⁹

Personal interests and the fear of losing power led Hoxha toward the formation of new alliances. “In the communist world, conflicts have to take an ideological character, even when the motives could have been personal interests, or the interests of specific political groups within the states. The Congress of the Communist Party of Albania best reflected this fact.”²⁰

According to documents from the Archive of the Party of Labour of Albania, from this moment on, “due to the position of the representatives of the Party of Labor of Albania, in opposition to the views of the delegation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the Bucharest Meeting, an open attack began against our party and country; efforts were initiated to damage Albanian-Soviet relations, impermissible interventions in internal affairs and political, economic, and military pressures began to be exercised and ratcheted up from day to day; an unfriendly attitude took root on the part of some Soviet leaders toward our party and our country.”²¹ As a result of continuing dissatisfaction, the situation would deteriorate into a direct confrontation in November of that year in Moscow, at the 81st Conference of Communist Parties from around the world. At this conference, the Albanian delegation was led by Enver Hoxha and included Mehmet Shehu, Hysni Kapo, and Ramiz Alia, who were the highest officials of the Party of Labor of Albania. According to historian Valentina Duka, this composition of the Albanian delegation was not coincidentally. As a matter of fact, Enver Hoxha wanted to show Khrushchev the unity of the Albanian communist leadership against the Soviets.²² The Albanian leaders would openly oppose Khrushchev and the policy he pursued in this meeting as well. Upon finishing his speech, Hoxha and the delegation he represented left Moscow before the meeting came to a close. According to an interviewee, “the relations broke off

18. William E. Griffith, *Albania and the Sino-Soviet Rift*. Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T., 1963, p. 34.

19. Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev*, p. 522.

20. CIA Documents. Soviet-Albanian Relations (1962):

http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/14/esau-19.pdf, p. 5.

21. AQSH, F 14, 1961, Dossier 4, p. 44.

22. Valentina Duka, *Histori e Shqipërisë 1912-2000*. Tiranë: shblu, 2007, fq. 271, p. 271.

from then and there on; that is why they came not on airplanes, but in cars, due to the danger that they would be blown up.”²³

Another important reason that had an impact on Albania’s distancing from the Soviet Union was the economic factor. “If Albania’s economic aid were cut off, this would have put the brakes on the building up of socialism in Albania.”²⁴ The Soviet Union would not keep the promises it made to furnish Albania with aid; therefore, the latter’s dissatisfaction increased. “In the economic sphere, the Kremlin drastically delayed and reduced shipments of wheat into Albania in the summer of 1960, even though it knew well that the population was threatened by famine.”²⁵

These disagreements were topped off by the conflict over the Pashaliman naval base. The base was erected with the aim of protecting the member states of the Warsaw Pact, and it was the only base of its kind that the socialist bloc had in the Mediterranean, in which the United States Sixth Fleet operated, and through which the main arteries of NATO passed.²⁶ Numerous Soviet specialists were stationed at the Vlora base; their relations with the Albanians would sour with the beginning of the conflicts between the two countries. “Since the Bucharest meeting in February 1960, relations at the Vlora base between the Albanian and Soviet crews began to be aggravated by the distrustful, contemptuous, and provocative attitude on the part of many people in the ranks of the Soviet crews toward those in the Albanian crews.”²⁷ We cannot say with certainty that the dissatisfactions and the aggravated situation at the Vlora base came only from one or the other side, since each side defended its own version. In a report sent to the command of the Armed Forces of Albania, it is said that: “in a conversation that B.P., ‘Vigilant’ (code name), had with the Soviet Valentin, the latter told him, ‘Your party has gone off course because you expelled Liri Belishova and Koço Tashko from the Party, because they were friends of the Soviet Union.’”²⁸ Reports of incidents of this nature between the two sides are numerous, and increase on a daily basis after 1960. The Soviet side put forth the claim that the Vlora base belonged to them, due to the fact that it was built with Russian aid, but the Albanian side opposed this claim, arguing that the base was under the sovereignty of the Albanian state; therefore, every effort to appropriate it would be considered an intervention into the country’s domestic affairs. This conflict, generated by dissatisfactions resulting from the respec-

23. Transcript, “Shefjet”, interviewed by B. Lala on 5 June 2017.

24. AQSH, F. 14, 1961, Dossier 4, p. 19.

25. Peter Prifti, *Remote Albania. The Politics of Isolationism*. Tirana, Onufri, 1999, 1999, p. 42.

26. AMPJ, F. 151, 1961, Dossier 434/3, p. 4.

27. Ibid., p. 65.

28. Central Archives of the Armed Forces, 1962, Dossier 150, p. 2.

tive governments, was resolved by the partitioning of submarines, four of which went to Albania and eight of which left for the Soviet Union along with the Soviet crew.

In 1961, it was clear that the improvement of relations was impossible. "In December 1961, Moscow broke off relations with Albania, a measure that had never been taken in the communist bloc, not even with Tito."²⁹ Influenced by continuing conflicts with Moscow, the Albanian state was forced to break off relations with other countries in the communist bloc as well, and to exit the Warsaw Pact, *de facto*, in 1961. According to the Albanian side, "the Soviet government not only ignored our occasional requests for the strengthening of the organizational structure, but, exploiting the Joint Command of the Warsaw Pact as an instrument for realizing its criminal aims toward our country, intervened multiple times to draw down the structure and the armed forces in such a way that there would not exist a secure basis for mobilization and in such a way that our country would be weak and dependent upon the Soviet Union."³⁰ In this way, the Soviet Union "finally transformed it (the Warsaw Pact) into an institution of enslavement in the hands of the revisionist Soviet clique,"³¹ wrote the newspaper *Zëri i Popullit*.

Even though it secured the alliance with Beijing, Tirana continued to fear a possible Soviet attack on our country. Hoxha thought that Khrushchev could intervene militarily and conquer Albania. "In line with the political and military situation our country finds itself in, the organizational structure of our army has grown and been reinforced in order that, in case of need, it would be able to defend the integrity of the country in the most difficult situations."³² As a former soldier explained, "we experienced the rupture in relations in the form of maximal military alert. We were on alert 24 hours a day; soldiers slept in their uniforms and took off only their shoes. This state of affairs continued for two or three weeks. The same thing was repeated when we left the Warsaw Pact in 1968, and at that time we expected a possible invasion."³³

From the Bucharest meeting onward, the propaganda in the country had worked in preparing public opinion for the possible rupture of relations with the Soviet Union. An interviewee says: "At the beginning,

29. Prifti, *Remote Albania*, p. 43.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

31. *Zëri i Popullit*, Tirana: 15 August 1963, no. 194, 1.

32. Central Archives of the Armed Forces, 1962, Dossier 150, p. 2. Report of the People's Minister of Defense, delivered to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania, on the measures taken for the reorganization of the army and the reinforcement of the defensive capabilities of the People's Republic of Albania following the Bucharest meeting.

33. Transcript, "Ramazan", interviewed by B. Lala on 24 August 2017.

we found out about the divergences between our country and the Soviet Union from the press, because they were the subject of propaganda, and we began to hate them. At that time, I thought that the Party had made the right decision, but today, in the view of hindsight, I think that it was a mistake, because the isolation was difficult, and the Soviet Union helped us a lot.”³⁴

The breaking off of relations with the Soviet Union would not only have economic consequences for Albania, but the conflict would generate numerous social consequences as well. Thus, upon splitting with the Soviet Union, thousands of students who pursued their studies in Russian academies and universities were required against their will to return to the country. In sporadic cases, some of them defected and sought asylum in the Soviet Union. As shown by archive documents, in 1961, Albania’s Military Attaché in Moscow, Dilaver Poçi, brought back information on a number of soldiers who did not return to the country. According to him, the case of an army captain who was not returning to the country could be explained by the following facts: “it could be according to his desire, he could have requested to stay here, or they could have abducted him against his will; it could be that he was late to catch the aerodrome and was afraid of the measures that would be taken; it could be that he was killed by the people here or run over by cars and they don’t know what to do...”³⁵; even in this case, accusations against the Soviet side did not lack.

The breaking off of relations would also alter the fate of dozens of mixed Albanian-Russian families, who were forced to split up. One of the interviewees remembers that “all of the Russians married to Albanians left; one of these Albanians I even had in my office. He was an engineer and was married to a Russian, an engineer named Ludmilla, who also left. Ludmilla’s husband made a mistake, together with two engineers from Vlora, along with a couple others; they formed a group opposed to the state and expressed their indignation over this event. They were caught, arrested, and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Ludmilla’s husband ended up in Spaç.”³⁶

Students who came from the Soviet Union were viewed with suspicion, since they could have been KGB agents, whereas the few Russian women who decided to remain in Albania were placed under the continuous surveillance of the State Security. According to an interviewee, “only a few Russians remained, and the Russian Embassy in Tirana called on

34. Transcript, “Nebi”, interviewed by B. Lala on 21 October 2017.

35. Central Archives of the Armed Forces, 1961, Dossier 106, p. 4.

36. Transcript, “Shefqet”, interviewed by B. Lala on 5 June 2017.

them often and gave them instructions.”³⁷

According to former diplomat and international relations expert Lisen Bashkurti, the people were convinced that the Party leadership had made the right choice in cutting off ties with the Soviet Union: “The low cultural and educational level of the masses, extreme poverty, fear, and the insecurity of life made Albanians fall under the spell of staggering propaganda, which cast Soviet pressure on the Tirana regime as a part of the ‘goal of imperialists and revisionists with the aim of overturning the power of the people, of destroying the victories of socialism, of endangering the liberty, independence, and sovereignty of Albania’”³⁸

Breaking away from the Soviet Union also isolated Albania from the wave of changes that were happening in the course of the policy of *détente* that Khrushchev was pursuing with the West. This choice would prove to be fatal to the future of Albania, which became even more isolated from its previous allies, orienting itself completely toward China.

Conclusions

The initial wavering in the relations between Albania and the Soviet Union began after the death of Stalin in 1953. This event has left a deep imprint in Albanians’ collective and individual memory. As interviewees recount, they had a great fondness for Stalin and for the Soviet people, a feeling nursed mainly by the propaganda of the time. Khrushchev did not enjoy the same authority in Albania as Stalin did, and even more, later, he would be considered a traitor to the Marxism-Leninism. The process of “de-Stalinization” and the denunciation of the “cult of personality” were not reflected widely in the country. The change in the course of domestic and foreign policy of the Soviet Union would cause the emergence of many problems between the two countries and ultimately lead to the breaking off of relations between them. In hindsight, as stated by those who were interviewed, the cutting off of ties with the Soviet Union, at a time when Khrushchev was pursuing the policy of *détente*, the easing of tensions with the West, greatly damaged Albania. The economic aid that came from China, despite being sizable, could not compensate for all of the disadvantages of the rupture of relations with the Soviet Union. The consequences of the conflict between the two countries would become

37. Ibid.

38. Lisen Bashkurti, *Diplomacia shqiptare. Vëllimi 2: Diplomacia shqiptare në fillimet e “Lufitës së ftohtë” 1945-1961. Nga Konferenca e Jaltës tek “bashkëgjizistenca paqësore”*. Tiranë: Geer, 2003, p. 463.

evident in the social dimension as well. Soviet specialists and other citizens living in Albania, whose culture and language had left traces in the local population, would be viewed as enemies, while the careers of numerous Albanian students in the Soviet Union would be disrupted.

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Perspectives from the Region

Post-Socialist Nostalgia: What Is It and What To Do about It?¹

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Something puzzling and disturbing has been going on in Eastern Europe for more than a decade now – the rise and spread of post-socialist nostalgia also known as *Ostalgie*, *Yugo-nostalgia*, and *Titostalgia*. The ideological orthodoxy of the past that we shed with relief not so long ago seems to be back as a viable choice. How come? Have we, to the east of where the Berlin Wall used to stand, taken again some kind of *Sonderweg*?

My answer is no; post-socialist nostalgia is not a deviation. I shall try to prove it exploring various dimensions of nostalgia as an existential phenomenon. In contrast to views of nostalgia as an escapist stance, or at best a compensatory and sentimental critique of the present, I shall look at its potential for self-positioning, (re-)establishing social bonds and coping symbolically with the changes.

What is nostalgia?

This is a legitimate question, having in mind the curious migration of the term from medicine to psychology, philosophy and literature to popular culture. Though it consists of two Greek roots – *nostos* (home-coming) and *algos* (pain) – the word is only “pseudo-Greek, or nostalgically Greek” (Boym 2001: 3). It was first introduced by Johannes Hofer, a physician, in 1688 as a diagnosis common among Swiss mercenaries abroad. In the first half of 19th century the ‘disease’ spread up the social ladder. Its ‘contagiousness’ was perhaps due to the fact that people talked a lot about it (Starobinski 1966). Towards the end of the 19th century, nostalgia came to be considered a psychic disorder rather than a somatic disease. It was already clear that the most effective therapy – to return home – was always a failure because nostalgics longed for the home they had left in the past, not for the one to which they returned. One consequence

1. This text is an abridged and updated version of: Koleva, Daniela 2011. “Hope for the Past? Post-socialist Nostalgia 20 years after”. In: Nicolas Hayoz, Leszek Jesien and Daniela Koleva (eds.) 20 Years after the Collapse of Communism: Expectations, achievements and disillusion of 1989. Bern-Berlin: Peter Lang, 2011, pp. 417-434.

was that nostalgia became a psychic state that could hardly be influenced, rather than a curable disease; another one – that it was conceptualised in temporal rather than spatial terms.

The metaphoric use of the concept, resulting from its complete de-medicalisation by mid-20th century, generated new semantics. Nostalgia was now perceived as the ‘dark side’ of modernisation; it followed the growth of institutional power and the decline of authentic social relationships. It reflected the loss of religious certainties and of the moral cohesion dependent on them. With its sense of historical loss, the ‘nostalgic paradigm’ (Turner 1987 quoted in Simpson 2005: 234) came to stand as an alternative to the linear narrative of progress. Most often this alternative of privileging the past has been identified as a passive, escapist, defeatist attitude to the present or has been criticised – with good reason – for its conservative bias. More recently, nostalgia has been regarded as a cultural practice possessing significant critical potential (McDermott 2002, Bonnet 2006, 2009) and as a key element of contemporary culture, typical for both ‘millenarian moments’ (Hutcheon 1998) and situations when culture becomes more diffuse and fragmented (Stewart 1988: 227).

What is post-socialist nostalgia?

This is also a legitimate question, as ‘nostalgia’ has become an omnibus concept whose growing appeal does not entail a growing precision of its uses. Talking about post-socialist nostalgia today, we tend to refer to different phenomena by the same term. Thus, post-socialist nostalgia is:

- a feeling of loss in a period of radical changes, be it an individual’s state of mind, a collective attitude or a broader cultural notion;
- a political rhetoric, most often employed by conservative actors (such as nationalists);
- a form of cultural production, part of contemporary popular culture.

Post-socialist nostalgia seems to permeate popular culture as much as personal memory. Its modalities range from commercials to TV programmes to everyday conversations. Nostalgia as a feeling of loss and yearning for the past is probably linked to nostalgia as part of popular culture just as mythologies of socialism draw on and feed back into personal and collective memories of socialism. My research so far has focused

on a fairly limited and literal notion of nostalgia – the longing for the past in personal narratives. The argument below is based on some 90 life story interviews with elderly people recorded in five localities in Bulgaria between 2006 and 2009.²

What are people nostalgic about?

As the ‘dark side’ of modernisation, nostalgic reactions can be expected in the aftermath of any deep and radical changes in society. Anthropologist Gerald Creed has observed that post-socialist nostalgia appears only with an awareness of the irreversibility of those changes:

‘Now [2006] that no one expects or fears a return to socialism, nostalgia is apposite. This suggests nostalgia indexes a particular type of memory, one that is based on lived experience and thus not too old or too far back, yet one that despite being relatively recent is not reversible or restorable. Nostalgia signals a rupture between past and present; a separation.’ (Creed 2010)³.

This observation seems quite accurate. It explains why the East German *Ostalgie* was the first version of post-socialist nostalgia and why Yugo-nostalgia appeared only after the end of the wars in the 1990s and first in Slovenia, which had been the first post-Yugoslav state to join the EU. Thus, post-socialist nostalgia – unlike what Svetlana Boym has termed ‘restorative nostalgia’ (Boym 2001) – obviously signals the end of the transition and is not necessarily associated with approval of socialism as a political system, let alone a desire to restore it. This is corroborated by the fact that many interviewees who overtly express a negative attitude to the communist regime seem at the same time to entertain, to a greater or lesser extent, a shared sense of nostalgia. Let us look closer into it.

– ‘Domesticated’ socialism

In these nostalgic accounts, socialism is not regarded as a political system but rather through its everyday aspects – clear evidence of what

2. The interviews were conducted in the course of two oral history projects of the Institute for the Study of the Recent Past focusing on the memory of socialism “from below”: “Remembering Communism: Memory «from below»” (2006–07) and “Knowledge and Memory Policies: Public (Mis)Use of the Recent Bulgarian Past” (2007–09). The interviewees were born in 1920s and 1930s, thus their active lives coincided with the period of communist rule.

3. I have used the manuscript kindly provided by the author and would like to express my gratitude to Gerald Creed for sharing his work prior to its publication.

Creed (1998) has aptly termed ‘domestication’, i.e. a consensus between the system and the populace based on a tacit re-negotiation of the social contract. This technology of power can be described with Bourdieu’s notion of euphemisation, which refers to subtle ways of exercising power that are unrecognisable as such and, consequently, socially recognised (Bourdieu 1977: 191). A woman (b. 1941) outlines the major aspects of the social contract:

...we were not interested what the ones at the top do. The important thing was that we were more or less OK, and we could, of course, buy cars, build houses and live our everyday lives merrily and calmly.

The system was seen as a given, as the only accessible reality, which is why for most socialist citizens the question was not whether and how to resist the system, but how to adapt to it. They did adapt, and now they yearn for that lost “normality”. Their discourse is lucid, straightforward, a-temporal and built on spontaneous and radical comparisons of the past and present. For instance, the shortages are re-packaged in terms of accessibility and well-being, however modest:

You have no idea what opulence means. People queued, their fridges were full. Now there is everything in the shops, fridges are empty.

...you go shopping with two leva and you fill your bag, now you can’t.

We used to live on modest money before as well, but we had no such bills to pay as we do now.

The system is completely absent from such memories. What they refer to is rather everyday life, which went on regardless – sometimes in spite – of the social engineering efforts of the regime.

- The Gemeinschaft, not the regime

The small scale, the perspective of the individual and her immediate warm community (*Gemeinschaft*) is central in nostalgic narratives. Here is how a former member of a village collective described the advantages of socialism – in fact, using the collective to her own advantage:

For these people – God rest their souls in peace, they passed away – but their goodness had no match. We would pack the hay, load it, the next day I’d cook a meal and get a bottle or two of something to drink – they wouldn’t charge me a penny, they’d bring down the hay.

This is a *par excellence* nostalgic narrative lamenting over an ideal, authentic and unadulterated reciprocity that has been destroyed. However, describing the goodness of the driver and his assistant who used to deliver the hay for her in exchange for a meal and a drink, the speaker does not

seem to pay attention to the fact that this was done using the collective's truck and fuel during their working hours. Poaching seems to have been a 'natural right' over what was common (cf. Creed 1998). Such practices may be considered as revealing a mentality inherited from the pre-socialist era where villagers legitimately benefited from community pastures and meadows. It is no less likely, however, that they were rooted in an estrangement from the regime and its incessant mobilisations. A statement from an 80-year old man made about himself at the end of his life story gives an expression of this mentality in a nutshell:

I haven't done harm to anyone. Yes, I have stolen firewood – but from the forest, not from someone else.

It is noteworthy here that stealing from 'someone else' is regarded reproachable because it breaks the solidarity inside the community, while stealing from the state-owned forest is entirely acceptable.

- Security, predictability

What nostalgics yearn for are the promises of the past, not its realities. Although interviewees always assumed the position of witnesses, their nostalgic representations related to the past not as testimony (i.e. establishing the truth about certain aspects of the past) but rather as fiction (i.e. creating an idealised past from selected fragments of the actual one). They yearned for past security in the face of the higher crime rate nowadays. The most common metaphor used to express this sentiment is the statement that people did not use to lock the doors of their houses at that time:

We didn't know at home what it was to lock the house. It stayed open, the house, both entrances, you go in and out – nothing happened. And now, now, as it were, we don't leave it unlocked. Doors can't stay unlocked because it's dangerous. That's it, otherwise, before there were no such things.

This interviewee went on to tell a story of a burglary in his own house. Eventually, it became clear however that the burglary happened in the 1980s, i.e. 'before', not 'now'. Crime and fear of crime seem to be a metonymy for the state of social decay and alienation the interviewees associate with the post-socialist transformations.

Another common metaphor for the contrast of past and present is walking along the streets at night. A woman tells about her work in shifts:

I used to come home, the second shift was till 10 p.m. Till I catch the bus, I'd come home at midnight or 1 a.m. Quiet. Now you'd be afraid [to walk] along the streets.

More generally, past certainty and predictability is contrasted to present uncertainty:

We used to live somehow calmer about the next day... somehow, life was better organised and you could do your best.

In these comparisons, the recent socialist past tends to appear as a period where life was fairly ordered and easily graspable with relative well-being, security and stability. And this is in contrast to the present with its insecurities and impoverishment, making the recent past more understandable and appealing to the interviewees than the present.

- Moral values

Although it is most frequently considered an escapist stance, nostalgia has a critical potential. Nostalgic utterances can be interpreted as a critique of the 'materialistic individualism' of the present from the point of view of the 'moral collectivism' of the past, i.e. values (perceived as lost) such as solidarity, equality, security, etc. Thus, the interviewees seem to react to their worsened material conditions and social isolation as well as take a moral position towards the present.

The idea of equality, borrowed from communist ideology (perhaps rooted deeper in a traditionally egalitarian society) has been adapted to the new situation as a criticism of the inequality of income and living standard. There seems to be blindness to 'old' inequalities and hypersensitivity to new ones:

They [the communist nomenklatura] used to be better off. But there was enough both for them and for the poor. ... And now, a handful of people have taken everything, the others forage in the dustbins.

The most pervasive narrative about the post-socialist transition is perhaps that 'some people' have become rich in illegitimate ways. Although, if taken at face value as such stories might be true in a number of cases, it seems that this narrative may carry a deeper, more general message: that social order has been disrupted and the redistribution of power and wealth has brought about new inequalities, painfully experienced. The nostalgic discourse articulates the perceptions of these inequalities in terms of a yearning for the solidarity and justice of the past:

That was taken away from the working people: there was justice to a greater extent than now...

There was something very well conceived... that is no longer there. There was collectivism.

There was morality. And now this is something archaic. Concepts! Morality, valour, honour, consciousness – oh, what is this?!

Now we no longer have the slogan “Man is other man’s brother” or “One for all, all for one”; now we have: “Homo homini lupus est”. ... Now everything is evaluated in money. People are also evaluated in money.

These statements can be interpreted as oblique expressions of the popular perceptions of mismanagement and alienation from the political processes, especially compared to the first years of the democratic changes. There seems to be something more, however, and it has to do with the very nature of the nostalgic critique. While the official communist ideology did collapse with the fall of the regime, and was indeed an empty shell even before that (Yurchak 2006), many of the less formal ideas that made the regime appear legitimate in the eyes of its citizens still exist and surface more or less explicitly in the interviews: ideas of equality, of prosperity, of order and the ‘strong hand’ of the government, of the socialist welfare state, but also of the state ‘cheating us’, etc. Indeed, as Karen Dawisha has noted about post-soviet Russia, if communism had succeeded in creating a *Homo sovieticus*, he cannot be expected to change overnight into a liberal-minded, democratic subject. (Dawisha 2005: 483). The ‘solitude of collectivism’ (Kideckel) did presuppose individualism, but at the practical level, as a way of muddling through. It was never recognised as a cultural value. This is the reason why the interviewees, all of whom belonged to the first socialist generation, adopted nostalgia as a moral position from which they judged the present. It is tempting to call this self-distancing ‘ethical nostalgia’. From the position of the moral superiority of an idealised past, ethical nostalgia justifies withdrawal from the chaos of the incessantly changing present and serves as a moral alibi for not conforming to the new rules and for questioning the new borders.

The nostalgic generation

There are different hypotheses (Neller 2006) explaining the rise of post-socialist nostalgia: as ‘inertia’, a result of socialisation within the socialist system; as a by-product of the painful evolutions after the velvet revolutions; as a way to express an anti-globalisation and EU-sceptical position; as a critique of new inequalities. Perhaps these hypotheses are complementary rather than alternative. No matter what its causes are, the nostalgia of the first socialist generation is passive and escapist on the surface only. In fact, this nostalgia is a form of engagement, both emotional

and intellectual. Pointing to the loss of moral certainty, it offers at the same time a way to claim ownership of the past. With individuals who have spent a substantial part of their lives during socialism, nostalgia seems to be (partly at least) a way to protect their own past. They often seem to think of themselves as a generation under moral siege insofar as their values, for the sake of which they previously had to make sacrifices, have now lost their importance. This is their way to voice a protest against the invalidation of their own lives and a claim to recognition of their experience and respect for themselves. Albeit in a contradictory manner, then, nostalgia has for them an emancipating potential.

On a wider societal level, nostalgia in this existential sense points to the lack of a transcending referential framework, i.e. of legitimate ways of incorporating the past into the present. So, in post-socialist settings nostalgia again appears as an alternative to a linear narrative pointing to the contradictory nature of the on-going social processes.

Five theses on nostalgia

Summarising the observations on post-socialist nostalgia as an existential phenomenon, I would like to formulate the following theses:⁴

- Nostalgia comes at the point of no return. It is not inspired by support for the former system but is a reaction to recent radical change.
- Nostalgia is a backward-looking utopia. It constructs an idealised picture of the past from selected fragments. It tells how the past should have been, not how it actually was.
- Nostalgia is a form of social criticism. By privileging an idealised past, it points to the deficits of the present. Thus, post-socialist nostalgia tells more about the post-socialist present than about the socialist past.
- Nostalgia is a form of coping with change and re-negotiating the past 'from below'. It counterbalances the rejection of the past as a threat to the present.
- The very existence of post-socialist nostalgia signals a plurality of alternatives that has become possible as a result of the democratic changes. The actually existing socialism as a political system brooked no nostalgia – it would have been considered sabotage.

4. For a detailed discussion see Koleva 2011.

Nostalgia and 'neostalgia'

While nostalgia among the elderly is understandable, what about those who have not lived under the communist regime? How can they be nostalgic? Or, is this nostalgia at all?

Nostalgia as a form of cultural production is widely spread in contemporary consumer culture and advertising in post-socialist countries. It is part of the 'hype' of some popular places, such as the restaurant "Checkpoint Charlie" in Sofia, Firkasz restaurant in Budapest (featuring socialist journalism), Broz café in Skopje, Komiteti café in Tirana, as well as of 'revived' socialist brands (Moreni waffles and Zagorka-retro beer in Bulgaria, Fructal fruit juice in some post-Yugoslav countries). Nostalgic representations and evocations are common in post-socialist popular culture as well: retrospectives of socialist cinema (including TV series such as the Czechoslovak "Major Zeman" and "The woman behind the counter"); covers and remakes of socialist pop music and a 'return' of socialist pop stars (most notably Karel Gott); museum shows of socialist everyday life, conceived perhaps ironically but embraced nostalgically by their audiences (cf. Kazalarska 2010); websites for sharing memories, etc. To refer to such an eclectic, sometimes ironic, but mostly superficial use of elements of the past in present-day popular culture, Slovenian sociologist Mitja Velikonja has invented the term 'neostalgia', i.e. 'new nostalgia'. Compared to the feelings of the elderly, it appears a 'false', 'fake' or 'pseudo' nostalgia. It is playful and hybrid, often "intentionally dissonant and boisterous" (Velikonja 2008: 32). It appropriates and re-fashions disparate elements in a DIY manner, typical of youth subcultures. Therefore, young people's mediated nostalgia for the socialist past is quite different from that of their grandparents.

Nostalgia and 'neostalgia' – or collective nostalgia, often embodied in cultural products – can be easily instrumentalised. They can help promote consumer goods as well as political programs. N(e)ostalgia is ideologically transparent, or trans – ideological. It can transmit different messages and serve different causes. Here lies a potential danger: it can be used for a superficial disneyfication of communism, or for nationalist, EU-sceptical and conservative interests. But it can also help for a critical review of the post-communist transition.

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Appendix

Conference Programme¹

17 November	
9:00 – 17:00 Venue: Tirana International Hotel, Classic Conference Room <i>International Conference “BETWEEN APATHY AND NOSTALGIA: Public and Private Recollections of Communism in Contemporary Albania”</i>	
9:00 – 9:30	Welcoming Coffee
9:30 – 10:00	Opening Speeches <i>Hildigund Neubert</i> , Former Commissioner for STASI files in Thüringen Representative of the Ministry of Education, Sports & Youth
10:00 – 10:45	KEYNOTE SPEECH <i>Daniela Koleva</i> , St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia Post-Socialist Nostalgia: What Is It and What to Do About It? <i>Moderator: Jonila Godole</i> , University of Tirana & IDMC
10:45 – 12:00	Session 1: POLITICS OF MEMORY <i>Rigels Halili</i> , University of Warsaw & Nicolaus Copernicus University of Toruń Remembering Communism The Interplay between Work on Memory and Work of Memory in Albania and Poland <i>Sokol Lleshi</i> , European University of Tirana Restoration of Tradition: Institutional Effects on Cultural Battles over Memory <i>Afrim Krasniqi</i> , University of Tirana & Albanian Institute for Political Studies (ISP) Everybody Pro and Against Communism: Paradoxes in the Change of the Political System and Attitudes Towards Communism (1990–1992) <i>Moderator: Elidor Mëshilli</i> , Hunter College, City University of New York
12:00 – 12:15	COFFEE BREAK

1. For further information see: <https://idmc.al/en/between-apathy-conference.html>.

12:15 – 13:00	<p>Session 2: COMMUNIST HERITAGE IN THE URBAN SPACE</p> <p><i>Kailey Rocker</i>, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Ruins, Bodies, and Pyramids: Exploring Communist Ruins and Memory Politics in Albania</p> <p><i>Ilir Parangoni</i>, Albanian–American Development Foundation Debating the Handling of Communist Ruins</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Francesco Iacono</i>, University of Cambridge</p>
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH
14:00 – 14:45	<p>Session 3: COMMUNISM IN THE MUSEUMS</p> <p><i>Alsena Kokalari</i>, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens Remembering the Communist Past in Albania: The Case of Bunk'Art Project</p> <p><i>Konstantinos Giakoumis</i>, European University of Tirana On the Politics and Pragmatics of Memory and Oblivion: Post-Communist Attitudes towards Communist Museology Approaches in Albania</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Irena Myzeqari</i>, European University of Tirana</p>
14:45 – 15:00	COFFEE BREAK
15:00 – 16:15	<p>Session 4: PUBLIC DISCOURSES AND PRIVATE MEMORIES</p> <p><i>Francesco Iacono</i>, University of Cambridge Communist Heritage and the Memory of Communism in Post-Socialist Albania: Between Public Discourses and Private Recollections</p> <p><i>Blerina Kellezi</i>, <i>Clifford Stevenson</i>, <i>Aurora Guxholli</i>, Nottingham Trent University Remembrance, Psychological Wellbeing and Intergroup Relations</p> <p><i>Gilles de Rapper</i>, Institute for Mediterranean, European and Comparative Ethnology, Aix-en-Provence Photography and Remembrance. Questioning the Visual Legacy of Communism and its Reception in Contemporary Albania</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Julie Vullnetari</i>, University of Southampton</p>

16:15 – 17:00	<p>Session 5: POSTER PRESENTATIONS</p> <p><i>Brisejda Lala</i>, University of Tirana Albanian–Soviet Union Relations in Private and Collective Memory</p> <p><i>Rashela Shehu</i>, Independent researcher Creation of Places of Collective (Communist) Memory in the Public Space</p> <p><i>Romina Kali</i>, Independent researcher Memories and Post-Communist Treatment of Former Persecuted Families of Shkodra</p> <p><i>Leonora Laçi</i>, Independent researcher Reçi's War in the Memory of People Yesterday and Today</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Sonila Danaaj</i>, University of Jyväskylä</p>
18 November	
<p>9:00 – 15:30</p> <p>Venue: Tirana International Hotel, Classic Conference Room</p> <p>International Conference “BETWEEN APATHY AND NOSTALGIA: Public and Private Recollections of Communism in Contemporary Albania”</p>	
9:00 – 9:30	Welcoming Coffee
9:30 – 10:00	<p>Session 6: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE REGION</p> <p><i>Cristian Vasile</i>, Romanian Academy of Sciences Remembering Communism in Romania: The Role of Historical Commissions</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Idrit Idrizi</i>, University of Vienna</p>
10:00 – 11:15	<p>Session 7: COMMUNISM IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH, FICTION, MEDIA</p> <p><i>Federico Boni</i>, Università degli Studi di Milano Specters of Communism. Albanian (Post) Socialist Studies and the Repression of Communist Legacies</p> <p><i>Elidor Mëhilli</i>, Hunter College, City University of New York “The Dictatorship's Archive”</p> <p><i>Brikena Smajli</i>, European University of Tirana A Poetic of Memory through Novel Narrativeness and Metanarratives of New Albanian Literature</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Kostantinos Giakoumis</i>, European University of Tirana</p>

11:15 – 11:30	COFFEE BREAK
11:30 – 12:15	<p>Session 8: COMMUNISM REMEMBRANCE AND YOUTH</p> <p><i>Jonila Godole</i>, University of Tirana & IDMC New Generation and the “Borrowed” Memory on Communism</p> <p><i>Irena Myzeqari</i>, European University of Tirana A “Loaned” Memory and a “Bittersweet” Nostalgia – How Youth Remember Communism</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Blerina Kellezi</i>, Nottingham Trent University</p>
12:15 – 13:00	<p>Session 9: PRIVATE RECOLLECTIONS AND EXTERNAL VIEWS</p> <p><i>Andreas Hemming</i>, German–Albanian Friendship Association “Did I not see, or Did I not Want to See?” Former West German Communist Activists Remember Albania</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Brikena Smajli</i>, European University of Tirana</p>
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH
14:00 – 15:15	<p>Session 10: PRIVATE RECOLLECTIONS</p> <p><i>Idrit Idrizi</i>, University of Vienna From Demonisation to Glorification: Typologies of Privately Remembering Communism in Contemporary Albania</p> <p><i>Irida Vorpsi</i>, University of Tirana & University of Vienna Communism in the Minds and Souls: Of Nostalgia and Forgetfulness in Post-Communist Albania</p> <p><i>Julie Vullnetari</i>, University of Southampton & Russell King, University of Sussex “Dancing in the Mouth of the Wolf”: Remembering Everyday Life at the Border in Socialist Albania</p> <p>Moderator: <i>Rigels Halili</i>, University of Warsaw & Nicolaus Copernicus University of Toruń</p>
15:15 – 15:30	CONCLUSIONS
19:00	DINNER

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