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**Face Up. Faces from the past. The fight
for freedom and democracy in Albania
during the regime of Enver Hoxha**

A cura di / Edited by
Michele Rabà - Gaetano Sabatini

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Special Issue

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Cultural relationships between Albania and Italy and the Face Up project: a shared historical memory about twentieth-century totalitarianisms

Gaetano Sabatini

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Cultural relations between Albania and Italy have experienced an extraordinary development in recent years, as a result of the commitment of the institutions of both countries, which recognize, in the fields of science, technology, conservation of artistic heritage and historical memory, a privileged ground for cooperation. Witness to this important joint commitment is the signing in Tirana, in June 2022, of a cooperation agreement for the years 2022-2025 between Italy and Albania in the fields of culture and education, as a culmination of the many events that annually characterize the calendar of cultural events that take place, now in a stable form, on both sides of the Adriatic Sea. One example for all are the more than 60 events of the "Italian Week," the second edition of which was held from June 1-7, 2023, covering the entire territory of Albania, from north to south, ranging from science to history, from theatre to art, not forgetting music, with opera performances, dedicated in particular to Giuseppe Verdi.

Within this framework of cultural relations, a special space is occupied by the historical research and the issue of the valorisation and preservation of the archival sources, that constitute the indispensable premise and lifeblood of historical research. In recent years, Italian archives have been engaged in an important effort to reorganize, increase accessibility and, where possible, make available on the web materials related to relations between Italy and Albania, with particular attention to the period of occupation and war (1939-1945). Among the many examples that could be brought in this direction, two of the most recent and particularly significant ones can be mentioned: the funds preserved at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI) and at the Istituto Luce.

At the MAECI's Historical Diplomatic Archive are kept the 135 envelopes of the papers of the Albania Office of the Cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs: after

the military occupation of Albania in 1939, was established an Undersecretariat of State for Albanian Affairs, which, in addition to bringing together all the functions previously exercised by the former Albanian Foreign Ministry, also dealt with internal political and economic-administrative matters, the execution of public works (roads and other infrastructure, land reclamation, etc.) as well as propaganda. In 1941 the Undersecretariat was abolished, and its responsibilities were for the most part transferred to the Albania Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, until its functions ceased in 1945. Among the documentation of particular interest is that relating to the personal files not only of Albanian exiles, internees and political persecuted, but also of Albanian students present in Italy, Italian personnel employed in Albania, etc. Similarly of great interest are the preparatory materials for the implementation of public works: maps of the territory and roads, mineral deposits, settlements, etc. An inventory of this important fund edited by Dr. Francesca Cinquina has recently been published online.

The Undersecretariat for Albanian Affairs, among other things, signed an agreement with the Istituto Luce, a body founded in Rome by Mussolini in 1924 with the aim of creating a powerful tool for political propaganda through the use of images and the dissemination of documentaries and newsreels. The Istituto Luce therefore created a special department in Tirana aimed at carrying out photographic and cinematographic filming in Albania. Originating from this activity is the Fondo Albania of the historical archives of the Istituto Luce where as many as 7,698 negatives are preserved - about 90 percent of them already catalogued and digitized - documenting the presence of the fascist regime in Albania, with particular reference to the events of World War II, between October 1939 and June 1943. This fund, moreover, is in addition to the no less important material preserved in the cinematographic and photographic section of the Istituto Luce's historical archives, which exhaustively illustrates, with 155 photo reports, 109 newsreels and 29 documentaries, the intensification of diplomatic relations between the two countries starting from the second half of the 1920s: state visits from both sides, official celebrations, military ceremonies, etc. A selection of the photographic holdings of the Istituto Luce's Albania Fund can be viewed directly online.

Also connected to the issue of remote consultation of Italian and Albanian archives is another important recent initiative, that of creating a network of electronically linked access points with the Central Archives in Tirana, an initiative launched in late 2020, partly in light of the difficulties created by the pandemic

crisis, at the initiative of the General Directorate of Archives of Albania. In addition to the 22 access points within Albania, others have also been created for use by Albanian-speaking communities outside the country's borders, in Kosovo and North Macedonia, and starting in 2022, also in Italy, in Calabria and Sicily, thanks to the efforts of Albanian language and culture professors and researchers from the University of Calabria and the University of Palermo.

One of the highlights, in the context not only of cultural relations but also of the path of reconstruction of a shared historical memory between Italy and Albania, was certainly the reopening to consultation of the fonds of the Archives of the Segurimi, the former Directorate for State Security of the Albanian Communist regime: created at the end of World War II by Enver Hoxha, the Segurimi, for four and a half decades a powerful instrument of repression, acted in concert with the establishment of internment camps for dissidents and opponents. Placed under the control of the AIDSSH, Autoriteti për Informimin mbi Dokumentet e ish-Sigurimit të Shtetit (Authority for Information on the Documents of the Former State Security Service), an independent public entity established in 2016, this documentation constitutes an exceptional source for the study of the activity of countering all forms of political and ideological dissent to the regime; in particular, in the first phase of Segurimi's activities, all the activities of repression and persecution against Italians present on Albanian territory are documented with great evidence.

Due to the great importance of this documentary material for the study of historical relations between Italy and Albania in the 20th century, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in Rome, on April 11 2023, between AIDSSH and the Institute of History of Mediterranean Europe, CNR ISEM, the only center of the National Research Council of the Republic of Italy dealing entirely with historical research. The memorandum, signed for AIDSSH by President Dr. Gentiana Sula and for CNR ISEM by Director Prof. Gaetano Sabatini, is particularly dedicated to the valorisation of archival sources and the implementation of research activities related to the history of the politically persecuted during the fascist occupation of Albania (1939-1943) and the subsequent communist regime (1944-1991), for an unbiased historical reconstruction of some of the darkest periods in Albanian and Italian history, as well as for the elaboration of good practices in the management of archives produced by political organizations in totalitarian regimes and in the preservation of the memory of facts and contexts.

The signing of the MoU between AIDSSH and CNR ISEM was also a positive consequence of the realisation of the project "Face Up. Faces from the past. The fight for freedom and democracy during the regime of Hoxha" a project funded by the EU within the program "Europe for Citizens, Line 1 - European Remembrance (2019-2022)" which had as partners of CNR ISEM for the Italian side the Department of Psychology of Sapienza University of Rome (Prof. Marino Bonaiuto, Silvia Cataldi) and the Fondazione di Storia onlus of Vicenza (Prof. Marcello Verga), and for the Albanian side the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Tirana (Profs. Migena Buka, Theodhori Karaj, Rudina Rama) and the Association "Zeri Qytetar - The Voice of the Citizen" (Dr. Teuta Korreshi), an association engaged in the perpetuation of the memory of the politically persecuted of Albanian communism and in particular in the study of the history of the internees in the Savër camp, near the locality of Lushnje, for more than four decades one of the main places of imprisonment of opponents and dissidents of the Tirana regime.

The Face Up project constitutes another important piece added to the long overdue effort to come to terms with the past of the communist regime in Albania. The combined work of different academic institutions and NGOs explored and brought to light the tragic and painful truth of the politically persecuted prisoners of an open-air labour camp, 27 survivors and their family members gave articulated long verbal testimonies about their life in the that camp. What emerges is an effective and highly repressive method, impregnated with hard-line ideology, and rooted in abuse of power and fear. It was a wall within the country as strong as the one made of armed guards that isolated the country from outside.

The Face Up project in fact included the valorisation of two important historical sources, oral and written: firstly, the interviews with the survivors of the internment camp and their family members, whose testimonies were the subject, at the same time, of collation and analysis work from the point of view of the psychology of the protagonists and the strategies of coping with the traumatic situations constituted by life in conditions of deprivation of personal freedom and permanent repression. Similarly, precisely the documentation preserved in the Archives of the Funds of the Directorate for State Security Sigurimi was enhanced, thanks to the availability of Dr. Ardita Repishti, former director of the Archives and currently a scientific collaborator of the Italian Institute for Modern and Contemporary History in Rome. As part of Face Up project, study meetings were held in Rome and Tirana (April - May 2022) and video materials about the history

of the Lushnje internment camp were produced for dissemination to a wide audience.

These early collaborations brought the attention on a shared historical memory between Albania and Italy to the topic of the liberticidal regimes that both peoples experienced in the 20th century, comparing data and presenting new materials from Italian and Albanian archives, largely never consulted before. It is in this important and well-established context of activities that the international symposium "Activities in the framework of the European day of remembrance for the victims of totalitarian regimes" took place, organized by AIDSSH, with the participation of CNR ISEM, held in Tepelena on August 23, 2023, according to an important annual recurrence that, since 2017, in collaboration with the Municipality of Tepelena, is part of an international program of commemoration and tribute to those who suffered repression and death at the hands of authoritarian regimes. Very evocative, in this sense, appears the choice of location.

Tepelena, in fact, first housed a military camp created by the fascist regime in 1939 and later was the site of an Albanian regime internment camp. More precisely, the camp was established by the Italian army in preparation for the aggression against Greece conducted from Albanian territory on October 28, 1940, triggering the Italo-Hellenic conflict; after the war, the barracks and buildings of the Italian military camp were used to house the families of the internees, until 1953, when the camp was closed due to excessively harsh living conditions, which resulted in extremely high mortality rates among the internees, especially infant mortality, as moreover documented by the summary burials found near the camp. Many of the internees from the Tepelena camp, after its closure, were sent to the Lushnja camp, which operated until the end of the communist regime in 1991.

Each year, on the anniversary of August 23, representatives of institutions, scholars and researchers, and representatives of the religious communities that were subjected to particular persecution, join survivors of the camps and their families to honour the memory of the victims; at the same time, an important dissemination activity is conducted to a wider public, including through the publication of materials and the creation of information and museum spaces, as well as through the creation of a multimedia educational platform, created by the Ministry of Education of Albania in collaboration with Albanian Public Radio-Television, to convey the data and information originating from this intense activity of study and historical research for a shared memory. All these forms of sharing historical memory concur toward the important goal of making the

Tepelena internment camp a museum facility, with Albanian and Italian documents from the period of the Italian occupation and the Albanian communist regime, that will allow students and tourists to approach one of the most tragic pages of 20th century European totalitarianisms.

Within the framework of the path for the recovery of a shared historical memory between Italy and Albania, in which the activities of the Tepelene symposium are included, there is also another research project involving CNR ISEM: it is the project "Accessibility and fruition of state and municipal archives between historical research and tourist valorization. Comparing cases between Italy and Albania" selected for funding under the Scientific Cooperation Agreement between CNR and MoES, Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Albania, for the two-year period 2023-2024, responsible for the Italian side Dr. Geltrude Macrì of CNR ISEM, and for the Albanian side Professor Metin Venxha of the "Fan S. Noli" University of Korçë.

The project began with the questions of whether and how historical archives can be enjoyed by a different audience than the one traditionally composed of specialists, scholars and professionals, and whether archives can be used for the creation of tourist itineraries, both questions that refer directly to the ongoing experience in Tepelena and its future developments. Through an overview of case studies, the scholars involved in the project will compare the modes of promotion adopted in the two countries (educational visits, thematic exhibitions, edition of sources, publications, use of social networks), as well as the use of technologies to guide and enhance the visitor experience, in order to develop common strategies to improve access, interaction and user involvement. In order to initiate a joint reflection on the possibilities of tourist enhancement of historical archives, it is also necessary to study in a comparative perspective the history and enhancement of archives in the two countries, to trace the main criticalities and obstacles for promotional actions in the institutions, to identify and study some cases of good practices, and to identify the elements and solutions that can be generalized and applicable to contexts other than those of origin.

Among the main results expected from the project there is first of all the implementation of activities that develop awareness of the link between communities and the archival records that preserve their historical memory, and the creation of products that spread knowledge of the wealth of archival heritage in the area and raise awareness in society of the importance of preserving archives at all stages of their formation. It is also intended to identify a significant number

of potential visitor itineraries among public archives; use archival sources to promote local cultural heritage; and select archival material for the musealization of the traditions of the respective territories. Finally, special attention will be brought to the understanding of the different ways in which the archival system of the two countries is organized in the territory: although the historical events of Italy and Albania have often been intertwined during the 20th century, the vicissitudes of Italian and Albanian archives have, however, been profoundly different, just as the ways in which the network of state preservation institutions is organized in their respective territories are different today: a system of archives spread throughout all the provinces in Italy, an amalgamated system, the result of a centralization process, in Albania.

The survey started with the identification of the first case studies to be analysed at the State Archives and at the municipal archives of the respective countries, and was then extended to other types of institutions, notably bank archives, which preserve the most significant sources for the reconstruction of Italian-Albanian economic and financial relations. In September and November 2023 and in May 2024, archival knowledge research missions were exchanged in Italy and Albania; in particular, the Italian mission visited the partner university and the main institutes and sites of cultural interest in the city of Korçë, in order to understand the context and the margins for the development of the project in the area concerned; in the city of Tirana, the Central State Archives and the Sigurimi State Security Directorate Archives were then visited, meeting with the archivists responsible for the enhancement activities of the respective institutes, with whom a fruitful dialogue was established to exchange bibliographical and historical information. Similarly, during a mission carried out in Rome in November 2023, the State Archives of Rome, the Capitoline Historical Archives were visited, the Historical Archives of the Bank of Italy, in particular to study closely the project of a virtual study room created here with the most modern computer systems, the Central State Archives, located in the district with the rationalist architecture of EUR, the subject of specific interest for the recent opening of a museum path created within the documentary deposits.

In a subsequent mission in May 2024, the Albanian delegation visited, among others, in Rome the Historical Diplomatic Archives at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and in Naples, the State Archives of Naples and the Historical Archives of the Banco di Napoli, which has been collecting banking documentation since the 16th century. In all the institutions visited, the

scholars met with archivists responsible for promotion and communication activities and discussed research issues with them. A further visit of the Italian delegation, which this time will also include religious archives and in particular the Franciscan Province Archives and Library in Shkodra, will take place in October 2024 while on December 3rd 2024 the project will conclude with a scientific meeting to be held in Rome, at the National Institute of Roman Studies, where ISEM is based, entitled "Archives and Territory: strategies for valorisation and historical research in Italy and Albania" which will see the participation of all Albanian and Italian scholars involved in the project and archivists from both countries. Finally, among the relationships established recently with Albanian and Italian universities and research centers, a mention should be made of the Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of joint research and for the mobility of faculty and students signed in November 2023 between the "Fan S. Noli" University of Korçë and CNR ISEM.

The essays collected in the present issue of RiMe. bear exemplary witness to this particularly important and fruitful moment of cultural relations between Italy and Albania on the theme of shared historical memory: they are first and foremost the results of the research activity carried out as part of the Face Up project. These essays have been joined by others with the aim of carrying out a careful reconstruction of the historical context in which to situate the experience of the internment camps of the communist regime in Albania, a political but also economic and social reconstruction, which also goes so far as to represent the historical phase of Albania's exit from dictatorship and its gradual return to democracy and to the natural geopolitical context of belonging constituted by Western Europe.

In the first of the essays, dedicated to *Scientific research in Albanian secret police files, three decades after the regime's fall. The authenticity of files facing their believability*, Ardita Repishti delves into the complex relationship of contemporary Albanian society with its recent historical past, and in particular with the forms of repression implemented by the communist regime between 1944 and 1991. Over three decades after the communist regime fall, Albanian society still manifests some sort of refusal to involve itself in debates on the multi-dimensional violence exercised against political opponents and their family members. An important step in this process of recovering and confronting its memory was the founding in 2016, as an incentive for EU membership of Albania, of the Authority on Access to Information on the former State Security Service, faced serious challenges in providing

believable information by opening the secret files of Sigurimi, the political secret police of the regime, and shedding light on its procedures. In particular, the essay explores the issues of the authenticity of this documentation, its reception, and the use that can be made of it for the purpose of reconstructing a shared memory.

To make the value of this documentary source more explicit, in the second essay, *The walls within. How the party and the state secret police Sigurimi kept the regime strong in communist Albania*, Alma Hado completes a brief review of the contents of the files kept at the Seguirimi Archive by the Albanian Authority of Former State Security Files, established 25 years after the fall of the regime: once the consent of the survivors was obtained, the researcher of the project could go through the dossiers that the representatives of the party and the state secret police kept through the years about each and every one of them and their families. The essay documents the cruelty of the regime as well as the consistency and the determination of its representatives to keep the power and to fight the enemies of the communist party. A thorough analysis of each case through the eyes of the perpetrators reveals, above all, the infinite human strength and the sense of survival under unimaginable circumstances. What makes Saver's story tragically unique is the duration of these atrocities: lives of generations deprived of personal freedoms and subjected to discrimination and persecutions for almost 50 years, a story of oppression, of isolation and sadness, but at the same time of extreme endurance and strength.

From reading the documents and testimonies describing the life of internees in the regime's camps, a question emerges spontaneously: how could we measure the psychological damage of generations living in total isolation and in constant fear? The essays collected in the second section of the booklet primarily aim to answer this question.

In the essay *Meeting the Needs of Hoxha Regime Survivors: An Analysis of the Responsiveness of Albania's New Democratic System*, the authors, Rudina Rama, Blerina Hamzallari, Migena Buka, Edmond Rapti, Theodhori Karaj, and Eralda Zhilla, point out how, in the early 1990s, the fall of the communist regime ushered in a wave of hope and optimism across Albanian society, especially among survivors of labor camps, prisoners, and political detainees. It was nevertheless urgent to adopt strategies in order to assist and reintegrate these survivors into society, employing the social-ecological systems framework and Transitional Justice theory as its lens. This essay analyses these strategies and highlights the necessity of adopting a holistic approach that encompasses legal and policy

reforms, alongside addressing social and psychological needs, to facilitate a seamless transition to a democratic society.

Within this process of reintegration and recovery to civilian life, the different psychological profile emerged clearly between those who, after the end of the regime, chose to remain living in the same location where the internment camp had been based and those who wanted to go elsewhere. In the essay *Differences between the coping mechanisms of people who lived in Savër, Lushnja labour camp, between the ones who fled after the '90s and the ones who stayed in Albania* the authors, Migena Buka, Rudina Rama, Edmond Rapti, Theodhori Karaj ed Eralda Zhilla, examine the responses of ex-detainees in the labour camps in Savër, exploring the reasons behind their choices to either flee Lushnja or stay there in the post-Hoxha regime. Through an in-depth analysis of the contents of the 27 survivors interviewed, the study uncovers how personal trauma, societal views, and resilience influence this decision. It reveals a complex dynamic of trauma processing, resilience, and the decision-making process regarding facing or escaping the past, shedding light on trauma recovery in totalitarian regimes and offering important insights into the paths toward healing and societal reintegration.

Still based on the interview materials conducted on former inmates in the internment camp is the essay *Social relations and internment camps: a socio-psychological analysis on a sample of interviews with former residents from Lushnjë* by Federica Floridi, Silvia Cataldi, Marino Bonaiuto, Alessandra Talamo. The essay investigates the psychosocial factors of internment in the Lushnjë camps, focusing on some specific aspects of group relations in extreme situations: the dynamics of categorization, stratification and differentiation in terms of ingroup and outgroup relationships, and the formation of internal cohesive relationships necessary for survival. Analysing the contents of the interviews, it is emphasized how, even in contexts of violence and dehumanisation, positive authentic relationships can be activated with people from both ingroup and outgroup and is examined the hypothesis of how such relationships can contribute to resilience.

The particular condition of detention in the Albanian communist regime's internment camps is analyzed from another angle in the essay *The situation before and after deportation among the survivors from Hoxha dictatorship regime in Albania* by Eralda Zhilla, Ortenca Kotherja, Rudina Rama, Migena Buka, Edmond Rapti e Theodori Karaj. In this case the focus of the essay is is on the conditions of familiar groups of the survivors before, during and after the experience of the deportation.

For the majority of the interviewed people, the period in the camp was the worst part of live, when they lost many members of their families and their own identity, but, despite of these terrible conditions, many of them elaborated strategies to resist and new form of solidarity and collaboration.

In the essays devoted to living conditions and forms of resistance in the Savër internment camp in Lushnja, Albania provides the backdrop for a narrative focusing on the tragic existences of the individual protagonists of that history and their families. In the next section of the issue, however, three essays delve into different aspects and different historical phases of the politics, economy and society of the country of eagles during communism, focusing on the early years, the middle and finally the final phase of the regime.

In the essay *Society in turmoil. The first economic reforms of a communist nature and the social consequences in Albanian society (1945-1948)* by Metin Venxha and Orjon Ago, are traced the stages by which, by the end of the Second World War, Albania became a communist country. The leader of the Albanian Communist Party Enver Hoxha, like his political opponent Zog, who was at first President (1925-1928) and then King of Albania (1928-1939), followed a policy of international alliances to help the economic reconstruction of the country. Relations with Yugoslavia, already very intense during the Second World War, were strengthened between 1944 and 1948 with a series of economic treaties signed to bring the country out of the post-war emergency phase. After the political break with its Slavic neighbors, Albania turned firstly to the Soviet Union and then to China as the only way to embark on the path of industrialization. The communist leadership violently subverted the social structure of the country in order to follow the Soviet model of a centralized and planned economic policy: private property disappeared completely, together with the bourgeois class, the free market, and individual freedoms. The economy of the early communist regime was the reflection of the political alliances that Albania created within the socialist world.

In the early 1960s Tirana would then interrupt the relations with Khrushchev's USSR, in controversy with the de-Stalinization process, and that with China would be the only international link would remain, destined in turn to be severed in 1978, condemning Albania to the most torturous isolation until the fall of the regime in 1991. But even before 1978, the following can be said. The establishment of communism in Albania went hand in hand with country complete isolation from other countries. The economic and trade relations, as well as borders with Greece, Italy and other countries of Western Europe, were cut off. Communists' opponents

left Albania at the end of the war. A part of those who remained in country were arrested and those who resisted were eliminated over years, while their family members were exiled and imprisoned.

The essay *The repatriation of Albanians from 1946 to 1963 of the 20th century and their integration into the communist society: the case of Korça region* by Orjon Ago and Metin Venxha analyzes a phenomenon that until now has not been studied: just at the time when violence and repression was getting stronger, there were individuals who returned to Albania: according to the documents in the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tirana, it appears that a certain number of people returned in the years 50-60s of the 20th century. This category of repatriates is formed by two groups: the first one consists of people who were abroad at the end of the war and had previously left Albania for economic reasons, and the second group were those who fled after 1944 for political reasons related to the communist system. Analysing the documentation available, the essay deepens on the period when these people returned, the countries they came from, the reasons of their return, how the Albanian authorities behave with them and how was their integration into the Albanian society of the time.

In the last historical framing essay, *Bracing against the tide: the final stand of the Albanian Labor Party to uphold communism* by Adelina Nexhipi, is finally analysed the terminal phase of the communist regime. While in the late 1980s democratic movements overthrew the communist regimes in Central Eastern Europe, the Albanian Communists were strongly convinced of the immunity of the country from these currents of political change, that were attributed the demise of communism to ideological deviations from the core principles of Marxism-Leninism. The essay elucidates how Tirana's leadership maintained a belief in the country's capability to persevere in its socialist construction and how the Albanian Labor Party's desperately attempted to preserve the regime.

Finally, the fourth and final section is devoted to a comparison with other cases of authoritarian regimes in the twentieth century that have resorted in a systematic form to the use of violence for the purpose of repressing political dissent, including the use of torture, physical elimination, and internment in camps.

The paper *Exploring the Social Dynamics of Internment: An In-Depth Qualitative Analysis of Human Connections in Totalitarian Environments* by Emanuela Ismaili, Edmond Dragoti, Rudina Rama, Migena Buka, and Eralda Zhilla, starting with the case of the Savër internment camp in Lushnja and the material provided by interviews with 27 survivors, examines the social dynamics within dictatorial

states, focusing on the experiences of individuals interned in Albanian concentration camps. Descriptive and interpretive categories have thus been developed that appear perfectly comparable with other case studies in different contexts: the challenges of seeking external assistance, the importance of intra-camp friendships, the pursuit of love and familial bonds, restricted communication, and the role of survivor groups. The findings underscore the profound impact of oppressive governance on human connections, revealing barriers to assistance, the resilience of interpersonal bonds within internment, and the isolating effects of restricted communication and control.

The two case studies under comparison deal with respectively Italy and Argentina, referring in the former to the years of the fascist occupation of Albania and in the latter to the use of violence in the historical phase preceding the establishment of the last military dictatorship in the years 1976-1983.

In the essay *The Fascist Internment System in Albania and Italy (1940-1943). First stages of research*, Jacopo Calussi analyses some aspects of the fascist occupation of Albania (1939-1943), in particular in the field of repression of Albanian rebels. By mean of the study of the archivist sources kept in the State Central Archive of Rome and other military documents, such as war diaries of the occupying armies and reports on war crimes committed by the Italian army between 1939 and 1943, the essay deepens into the fascist internment system within the territories of Italy and Albania, in a particular during the war period.

The case of the fascist internment system in Albania is interpreted here in comparison with other Italian-occupied territories, analyzing their operation, the characteristics of the interned population and the reasons for internment. An interesting comparison is then established between the ways in which internment camps were set up and operated by the Italians in Albania after the 1939 occupation and until 1943, by the German army in Italy after the armistice of September 8, 1943, and the subsequent occupation of the central and northern regions of the country, a confrontation that refers both to the major issues related to the world conflict, such as rationing, management and exploitation of the human and territorial resources of the occupied areas, as well as the maintenance of law and order, repression or agreement with resistance movements, and the management of the Jewish question.

But before arriving at internment camps, for the creation of which total control over a territory is a prerequisite, conditions may occur in which violence is practiced precisely as a condition for ensuring regime change or the consolidation

of an authoritarian regime. In the essay *Criminal Justice and Police in the Process of the Construction of State Terrorism in Argentina*, Osvaldo Barreneche describes this situation with reference to the years leading up to the establishment of the last military dictatorship of the years 1976-1983. State terrorism in Argentina, in fact, began to take shape long before 1976: early stages of this process took place during the late 1950s and, mainly, during the 1960s. This article studies the role of police and criminal judges of the Buenos Aires Province in this preliminary stage during which State violence acquired a definite physiognomy. The emergence of various formal and informal scenarios in which police violence took place contributed to reinforcing the impunity of the law enforcement agents in the exercise of extra-judicial violence. Criminal judges at that time favoured this state of affairs, intervening very little and even permitting such actions.

The examples provided by the contributions presented in this issue of Ri.Me. document with different study proposals, different methodologies and sources and new interpretative cuts, the extraordinary vitality of the research activities in which the path of reconstruction of a common historical memory between the two sides of the Adriatic, between Albania and Italy, is currently substantiated, with reference to the theme of totalitarianisms of the twentieth century and the archival sources with which to study them. It is a vitality that must be translated, at the same time, into an ever-growing commitment to the preservation and promotion of the values of freedom and respect for the rights of the person, against all ancient and new forms of oppression, persecution, segregation.

Scientific research in Albanian secret police files, three decades after the regime's fall The authenticity of files facing their believability

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Riassunto

Uno degli aspetti più complicati del rapporto tra la società albanese e il suo passato comunista è il dibattito sulla repressione perpetrata dal regime totalitario tra il 1944 e il 1991. Dopo tre decenni, la società manifesta ancora una sorta di rifiuto a impegnarsi nel dibattito sulla violenza esercitata in più modi contro gli oppositori politici e i loro familiari. Istituita nel 2017 come incentivo per l'adesione dell'Albania all'Unione Europea, la 'Autorità dei Fascicoli' si è impegnata a fornire informazioni credibili, aprendo i fascicoli segreti del Sigurimi e facendo luce sulle sue procedure.

Abstract

One of the most difficult components regarding Albanian society's relationships with its communist past is the debate on repressing features of the totalitarian regime, 1944-1991. After 3 decades the society still manifests some sort of refusal to involve itself in debates on the multi-dimensional violence exercised against political opponents and their family members. Established in 2017 as an incentive for EU membership of Albania, the Authority of Files faced serious challenges in providing believable information by opening the secret files of Sigurimi and shedding light on its procedures.

Parole chiave

Transitional justice; Era comunista; fascicoli segreti; autenticità; credibilità.

Keywords

Transitional Justice; Communist-Era; Secret Files; Authenticity; Believability.

I. - II. - III. - IV. - *Bibliography. - Curriculum vitae.*

I.

One of the most difficult components of all hardships regarding Albanian society's relationships with its communist past is the debate on repressing features of the totalitarian regime, 1944-1991.

Three decades after the communist regime fall, Albanian society still manifests some sort of refusal to involve itself in debates on the multi-dimensional violence exercised against political opponents and their family members; about political prisons, about internment/deportation system, people's suffering for generations in such prisons and camps, and the numerous maltreatments they went through.

Most of the Albanian people (living in the country and abroad) are still dealing with the consequences of not addressing issues of the past, also with individual and collective trauma, even generational, neither addressed by the state nor its institutions.

Key transitional justice mechanisms including holding communist-era perpetrators accountable, the rehabilitation and compensation of former victims, and state acknowledgment of past injustices have been incomplete. The voices and interests of victims and their families have often been marginalized.

On the other side, in 30 years the country moved forward, ruled also by individuals with institutional and political power, as legal and social influence, who had meaningful official experiences during the communist regime, and who adopted their competencies to the new democratic era, being always attentive to be part of all the important processes which the post-totalitarian Albania went through.

For a population of almost 3 million in isolated Albania in 1991 - where 34.000 were political prisoners, 59.000 put in concentration or internment camps or places, where forced labor was widely applied, 7.022 were deceased because of the internment conditions; some 6000 persons were estimated to have disappeared at the hands of state or state security officials as a result of (extra-)judicial killings in prisons, internment and labor camps, deaths resulting from hunger, exhaustion and disease, as well as citizens murdered while attempting to flee the country (ICMP 2021), and some thousands of people put in the hospitals for mental health, – dealing with the totalitarian past was yet hazy phenomenon from the historical perspective, also the human rights point of view.

Today, Albanian society and politics continue to be marked by high levels of antagonism and distrust. One of their driving forces is the unaddressed legacies of

the communist past, which permeates civil society and has shaped antagonistic views both on the past and the present.

In this regard, dealing with the past violence from different perspectives, with little predictability and no linearity of society, – including opening the files of the secret political service, – addresses this challenge head-on, trying to reconcile Albanians with their past, as well as among themselves.

The communist past might remain a battlefield for politicians rather than an opportunity for reflection, apologies, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

On the other hand, the legacies of a hurtful past will not disappear magically, they will continue to hunt Albania and pop up in unexpected places and contexts. Thirty years after the end of the old regime, the time appears ripe to address it. In this regard, the files of Sigurimi service have been secret for decades, even some initiatives of independent commissions such 'Mezini' and 'Bezhani', were undertaken during the first years of democracy (1995).

Many officials of the communist regime, well-known and unknown to public opinion went through the *verification process* of the commissions during that period. Others retired from public life before the commission came with a public result of their careers in the Secret Service or its structures. This was a silenced success of the transparency process.

On the other hand, there were important officials of the communist state, involved with Sigurimi, that went through the verification process and resulted "negative". "Certificated" as "pure" of their "past", they had the opportunity to continue their careers in the democratic Albanian society, and in decades, to contribute and to be part of the decisions and reforms made by the Albanian state, in crucial phases of transition.

Lustration was missing from the beginning and no access to Sigurimi files was allowed, except for the members of the commissions.

This led to speculation, myths, blackmail, and deep-rooted social problems.

In 1997, Albania faced difficult times regarding the problems with the post-totalitarian pyramid system. The whole country went on fire, especially the archives, the depositories that hold the data of thousands and thousands of people during the dictatorship or the previous years.

A lot of central and local archives of different typologies went destroyed, vandalized, or reported as such, partially destroyed; so, many files and information on Albanian history and its legacy were considered as turned pages of the "past", closed forever by the chaos and fire.

In 2017, 26 years after communism fall, the Albanian Authority on Access to Information on the former State Security Service was established by the law (No. 45/2015) on the right to information on the files of the former state security services during communist times, to provide access to the files, preserve the records of oppression, to educate the public and future generations, and support the democratic values of justice, truth, reconciliation, transparency, integrity, collaboration, responsibility, and proactive learning.

EU membership of Albania as a candidate in 2014, was an incentive to demonstrate its democratic capacities. The efforts to address human rights violations during communism were intensified. Public debates focused on the current treatment of communist victims, the absence of lustration law, and the publication, in local media, of Sigurimi files on particular individuals, typically by anonymous sources.

Interesting insights into popular perceptions about the communist past were the results of the 2016 survey on 'Citizens' understanding and perceptions of the communist past in Albania and expectations for the future' published by the OSCE (OSCE 2016) before the Authority was established.

The survey concluded that, in general, there was low concern about the communist past in Albanian society; that almost half of the respondents consider the historical role of Enver Hoxha as "positive"; and that the communist past does not rank+ compared to other problems such as corruption, bad governance, economic problems, and impunity. The survey highlighted that even respondents who were persecuted during communism were not significantly more informed about transitional justice measures than non-victims (concretely on the 2015 law *On Opening the Files of Former Secret Service*)¹. The OSCE survey revealed a strong distrust towards dealing with the past processes – an outcome of the failure of the previous 25 years in terms of building trustworthy state institutions and the rule of law (OSCE 2016).

Authority of Files was established in this hazy atmosphere of doubt and mistrust, strongly supported by the Euro-Atlantic institutions, embodying the European Parliament's call to keep alive the memory of the past, since there can be no reconciliation without truth and remembrance; reconfirming Albania's stand against the totalitarian rule of any form or ideological background and respecting

¹ Interesting is that the survey nevertheless showed that 90% of people which had read the 2015 law on Opening Files of former Secret Service in Albania supported it (OSCE 2016).

the European values of human rights and dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law.

As understood, until 2017, the year when the Authority started to work as a collegial institution, scientific research on Sigurimi files was impossible. But the process had to begin, first by opening the secret files.

The suspicions were present because, as mentioned above, many of the officials of the past continued and closed peacefully their careers during democracy, having even important roles in all the democratic processes of the future of the country.

A future held by a present called transition, where the *dialogue* or the *debate* on the past and the fate of the victims, their rehabilitation, integration, and re-narration of the history of the “enemies of people” was systematically postponed, not addressed properly and victims continued to act and to be considered as such.

This victim’s legacy marginalized them during the decades of democracy, without shedding light on the past, with no open information on political prisons and forced labor camps and forced labor work during dictatorship; in a present with almost no chance of finding the remains of their familiars still missing, executed with or without trial, tortured or arrested from the regime...

No information, no evidence, no body, no crime...

I began to work for the Authority of Files in 2018, after years of experience with communication, culture and education in governmental and nongovernmental institutions. It was one year after the institution applied the organic law 45/2015 on the first requests of opening the files from individuals, institutions, researchers and media.

As a public servant, I had to deal with the fatigue of wounded people, and their distrust of institutions of memory, especially the new one, established almost three decades after the fall of the regime.

On the other side, the organic law 45/2015 of Authority, with its need for improvements, had wide international support and it went hand in hand with the internal need of society for transparency and healing. I understood, with my colleagues, that we had a chance to make it right.

There were a lot of files and millions of pages of documents inherited from the former communist regime, even part of them were destroyed at the beginning of ‘90. This considerable amount of archival material provided an excellent opportunity for researchers of different backgrounds to conduct in-depth archival investigations and contribute with evidence to a strengthened public debate on the country's reconciliation process.

Convinced that Albanian society's emancipation can be nurtured only by adopting a bold scientifically objective and empathic approach towards the past, since its first steps, Authority was supported in national and international projects, for different studies on files and personalities persecuted and surveilled.

In this regard, Authority had a meaningful role in the critical debate and memorialization of the communist past, – with a creative mixture of cultural and educational activities, – involving both government counterparts and civil society actors (including Albanian youth, pupils and members of the diaspora) to further dealing with the past, remembrance and accountability.

This had to do with the implementation of an innovative mix of legal, cultural, educational, artistic and psycho-social approaches and instruments:

- 1) realizing victims' rights to justice and rehabilitation,
- 2) promoting a public memory recognizing past injustices,
- 3) engaging new audiences in debates about the communist past and
- 4) educating the next generation.

Scientific research and civic education, – through open communication, publications, and collaborations, thematically and geographically addressed with all the instruments and actors involved, – became the perspectives the Authority routed its challenges of opening the secret files.

Almost three decades after the fall of the regime, Albanian history had been narrated only by particular selective aspects of the oppressive communist experience.

In this regard, the Authority faced the challenges of providing believable information, by opening the secret files of Sigurimi; and then explaining their content; shedding light on the procedures of Sigurimi to surveille and persecute thousands of Albanians, also on the procedures and combinations that perpetrators used to maintain the power and weaken the victims.

Important initiatives of dealing with the past: national projects, scientific conferences, educational and informative exhibitions, and publications on opened files were undertaken, with the expertise and support of international organizations and the Authority's counterparts in ex-communist countries of the Eastern bloc.

Their experiences, challenges, successes, or failures helped Authority in its work with files.

The communication strategy of opening the files, providing their content, information and also demystification of Sigurimi, with exhibitions of authentic

documents, or presentation of informative ones; dedicated events, roundtables; awarded personalities, well-known and unknown from the public opinion for their actions of dissidence during the dictatorship; publications, open meetings, and mobile exhibitions all over the country, escalated slowly and gradually in big public events, always involving central public institutions, local government, NGO's and youth, gaining step by step, considerable impact.

Different publications of Authority, of studies on files and personalities, persecuted and surveilled, in Albanian and English, have been widely delivered and shared, hardcopy and online.

Authority operated always in close collaboration with the media, considered an important actor of transparency and communication, providing access to Sigurimi files, and ridimensioning personalities in the light of new facts.

Gradually, these had been contributions to the transitional justice processes in Albania.

Between them, the project on untold stories of Lushnje, – which started in 2019 with the first collaborations in Lushnje and its 11 villages with interned people: Saver, Gjaze, Plug, Grabian, Gradishte, etc., – based on social engagement, scientific research on the full Tepelena narrative, to continue with the contribution of the files and the pictures of the families of survivors of “Face up...”, EU-funded project, a combined work of different academic institutions and NGOs.

Since March 2022, the Authority on Files has physically assembled all Sigurimi-related files from the Intelligence, the Ministry of Interior and the Labor Party archives in its new building on the premises of the former military aviation school. Currently, Authority it is digitizing these files.

The original stock of the Sigurimi archive consists of some 212'000 paper files, corresponding to some 20 million individual paper documents. The archive also includes '1'600 inventory lists, 8'500 minutes (procès-verbal, paper documents), and approx. 250'00 indexing cards and around 1'400 microfilms (containing approx. 43'000 images)' (Diday 2017). The Sigurimi had classified about 14,000 individuals as employees and collaborators who often spied on relatives and friends (IDMC 2019). Importantly, many of the politically sensitive files were destroyed in the early 1990s.

From time to time, the challenge of openness faced important questions: can the truth be discovered in Sigurimi files? How do you get information about the past and the secret political police?

Do you need to be previously well informed, in order to open, and understand a file written from the “weapon” of the ruling party?

So, are the Sigurimi files authentic? Can you rely on them?

How can be understood and explained what is written in Sigurimi documents, once you read what the secret police of state managed to provide for the “enemies of people”?

II.

The published file of Martin Camaj in 2020, – a well-known Albanologist, poet, and modern novelist, – was a highlight of the work of Authority with files, about their scientific and transparent publication.

The article *Fake myths* was published by a known communicator of *scoops*, history or social activism, using the first page of the file of Martin Camaj, – a page that suggested that Camaj, loved and appreciated by Albanians all over the world, – was a collaborator of Sigurimi.

Only this document of the file of Martin Camaj (92 pages total) was compared with some other information, selected in short sequences from CIA files, to enforce the idea of a guilty personality, finally discovered and put to light for everyone.

This article had an impressive domino effect on Albanian society, intellectuals, linguists, readers, and people who grew up with his poetry and novels. Past and its shadows were present in Albanian daily life and people had to deal with it.

This publication (an inappropriate one, that didn’t respect the rules, nor the declaration of confidentiality of materials) made everyone to pretend an answer from the Authority of Files.

Was it true? Was the document authentic and believable?

Was Martin Camaj a collaborator of Sigurimi, an agent that operated for the Albanian secret service against the people who believed in him, in Albania, Italy, and Germany, where he lived and had an impressive carrier in Albanian language and literature? Did communist power use him, as other Albanians that escape the country, a wise man appreciated by the Albanian diaspora that opposed the dictatorial regime?

10 requests from well-known historians were presented immediately to the Authority of Sigurimi Files, to discover what the file was about. More than 70 articles were shared by Albanian journalists, critics, and historians all over the

world, to discuss the phenomenon of secret files, if he was really a collaborator, and what the files were about.

Once again, the collaborators were in the eye of the cyclone, not the operatives of Sigurimi. The debate continued to distort the guilt, from perpetrators (as persons that obeyed the law) to collaborators (stigmatized).

In this context, the debate of ex-operatives of Sigurimi, who wrote as experts of files and gave their interpretation regarding the document published from the file of Camaj, tried to avoid the real issues of files, addressing collaboration, and not instruments of the system on innocent people that opposed the regime.

Sigurimi “worked” with different typologies of collaborators; most of them under coercion, through pressure on the families of people persecuted and surveilled. So, victims of totalitarianism, – not their perpetrators, – were accused once again, and the debate was once again on ethical opinions and judgments.

Authority had to answer professionally and transparently to the high interest of society, media, and intellectuals on files, serving the truth, and catching the moment for the society to get lessons from a past that didn’t pass.

A roundtable on Martin Camaj was organized, where all the attitudes had to be faced, and discussed. The meeting was held in presence and online, with the participation of his family, of well-known intellectuals in Albania, and his scientific collaborators in Germany, the United States, and Italy. All of them had studied his file and everybody came with different views on it. The truth had so many voices...

It was the first time that the Authority talked about the authenticity of files, facing their believability. It was an important turning point in the work with files and their content.

Incorrect reading of files and their messages can lead to the mistake of blaming the victim again and justifying the actions of the regime as procedures supported by the laws of the time.

This mechanical reading, without background and research on Sigurimi, damages the process of transparency and truth, leading to disinformation, which continues craftily 30 years after the fall of the system, nurturing the old narrative of “enemies of people”.

The roundtable on Camaj, in COVID times, was transmitted live from Albanian public TV and social platforms, with the participation of historians, scientists, journalists, counterpart institutions, Albanian’s Prime Minister, representatives of politically persecuted people, international organizations, youth, and media.

The crystal personality of Martin Camaj, loved by everybody, made together a country and its diaspora on the issues regarding the secret files of Sigurimi. Past and present, hand in hand, had to contribute to a future without fear of guilt and mud.

The same day of the roundtable, for the first time, Authority presented a documentary exhibition with a large number of files of collaborators (protecting personal data), in order to inform people about Sigurimi, shed light on the past, and also to demystify what Sigurimi was described.

Authority could explain what the secret files were about, how they were written, produced, or fabricated, and the way they should be read, – avoiding manipulation and disinformation, – in order to be understood.

As in Camaj's case, the answer on his file and every file similar to his, was not just *yes* or *no*. The file of Martin Camaj was not the file of a collaborator, with its elements of collaboration and being a secret agent. It was a large file of surveillance in Albania, Italy, and Germany, except for the first page.

So, the information and content of the file had to be explained, as the fact that a declaration of collaboration, - with some suspicious elements on the language, sign, and perfect details of composition (that in fact were strongly improved in the last years of the regime), - was part of a file of surveillance, opened in 1948.

All the other pages (90) had information on surveillance and operative techniques how Camaj was followed and provoked worldwide. There were zero data on his activity as a collaborator in Albania, Italy, and Germany.

Sigurimi aimed to create a fake distorted image of him in the Albanian diaspora, and all the action plans and procedures that led to that, also as intimidation and plans of threatening, were documented in his file.

Most of the materials presented at the roundtable from Albanian institutions and researchers, also from German and American ones, soon will be published by Authority, as a contribution of the actions and procedures that the secret police used to create the files of *enemies of the regime*.

My land
When I die, may I turn into grass
On my mountains in spring,
In autumn I will turn to seed.

When I die, may I turn into water,
My misty breath

Will fall onto the meadows as rain.

When I die, may I turn into stone,
On the confines of my land
May I be a landmark.

Martin Camaj, 1962

[Vendit tem, from the volume *Lirika midis dy moteve*, Munich 1967, translated from the Albanian by Robert Elsie and first published in English in *An elusive eagle soars, Anthology of modern Albanian poetry*. London: Forest Books 1993, p. 32]

III.

The second case regarding believability is the file of Mikel Koliqi, a man of religion, which illustrates the history of the communist half-century, mostly as an “oriented history”, neatly inherited from power, that fed opinions and perceptions commanded at the source, escalated them, oriented them and finally used them as facts.

Among the others is the case of Dom Mikel Koliqi, the first Albanian cardinal, appointed by Pope John Paul II in 1994, one of the Catholic priests who had gone through the system of violence in communist Albania. Born in Shkodra in 1902, the vice-bishop Mikel Koliqi was considered by the regime to be “rich, with a high theological education, and the brother of the ‘war criminal’ Ernest Koliqi”².

These would be sufficient to classify him among the “enemies of the people”, and to sentence him to prison and internment, from 1945-1986, accused of being an “agent of the Italians”, along with his brother, Ernest Koliqi, former Minister of Education during the Italian occupation, active in the neighboring country in the activity against the “people’s power” in Albania.

The pre-prepared scenario, which punished Dom Mikel based on superficial opinions and judgments, due to family proximity and without factual evidence, marked the life of an “enemy” for 38 years, in 47 years of totalitarianism. This is one of several thousand stories of persecution that together make the big picture that portrays the totalitarian state and its relationship with the citizens.

² AIDSSH (Authority for Information on Former State Security Documents), F. Operative, D. 5781, According to the file of the Security for Mikel Shahin Koliqi, under surveillance from 1953 to 1988.

In most of the political processes, supported by files with a strong political background, the accusation would also include the connection of the accused with the government or foreign intelligence services. This reinforced not only the “treason against the fatherland” of the accused, but served to convince the people that the individuals who were against the “people’s power” were simultaneously traitors to the fatherland, since only this power could maintain the independence and sovereignty of the state, trampled by the “ruling classes” in the past. Such binomization of the “class enemy” with the “traitor of the fatherland” served the regime to promote the syndrome of fear for the independence threatened by foreign interference and, as a consequence, to convince the people “keep close relations” with the government.

In this context, the 38th year file of Koliqi, one of the thousands of enemies condemned in Lushnje in interment villages, is a collection of opinions, political attitudes and secret police organization against the enemy. It has a strong language of hate, as all the files of the clerics, who were prejudiced by the communist regime.

In the case of Koliqi and other representatives of religion, the questions on their Sigurimi files have to deal with a centered political approach: how can their “documented” opponent’s activity against the state and people be repeatedly condemned, once facts are missing in the files, substituted by opinions and political attitudes? How a new narrative or memory can be rebuilt, if the official documents of surveillance, that led to years of political prison and internment, are prescribed scenarios?

IV.

Anyone who thinks that the Communist regimes are exclusively the work of criminals is overlooking a basic truth: the criminal regimes were made not by criminals, but by enthusiasts convinced...

Milan Kundera, *The unbearable lightness of being*

Missing people during the communist dictatorship and data on their disappearance in Sigurimi files are other cases of *enthusiasts convinced*.

Even though people knew Sigurimi tortured them, data on violence and torture is difficult to find in Sigurimi’s files. Torture couldn’t be documented, (in the

instructions and rule procedures of secret police and surveillance, violence and torture are not mentioned).

When the Party and Sigurimi decided to turn the page, sacrificing high-ranked officials and new people were appointed, they were condemned as enemies, and torture and violence were addressed to their leadership of secret police service or Ministry of Interior. So, reports on violent acts on “enemies of people” in four decades, starting from 1944, can be found in their “testimonies”, part of Sigurimi files.

Also, opponents of the communist regime, former politicians, former State Security Service collaborators, citizens who became part of the list of enemies, fugitives, clerics, former party secretaries, former ministers, artists, journalists, and intellectuals, are found in the official Historical records of the former State Security with a common denominator: victims of totalitarianism. No one could ever be secure.

Behind 19 books, preserved as reports in Sigurimi archives, with important data of violence and acting in secret, for more than four decades stands the story of a society that, through the Historical records of the former State Security Service seems to be a calendar of murders, shootings, eliminations, annihilations, and no fewer prisons and internments.

The secret documents, through the history written by the winners, are now summaries that document their deeds.

Authority reviewed the Historical records of 19 former State Security Service branches of the country, to make up the informative exhibition *Sigurimi in its own words*, where came out that 510 people were killed by the State Security, mentioned by name in the respective historical records and 470 people killed without keeping a record of their names, who are registered next to the others, described as: others.

The research identified persons for whose execution, the State Security Service takes over the authorship, referring to its documentation issued in 1973-1980, as it is already affirmed, “carefully worked and scientifically edited”. The documents covered a wide period, which indicated that the activity of the State Security Service dated back to the Second World War, confirming acts and actions against political opponents, even earlier than the installation of the communist system(!).

Nevertheless, should State Security documents be taken for granted, and should the information of these Official Historical records be considered as complete? Certainly, not!

Historical records, like documents compiled by the Secret Police of the former system, disclose summarized information on a time when the State Security Service was consolidated and intended to present the events from certain perspectives.

According to Official Historical records declassified by the Authority in 2019-2021, State Security assumes the authorship of several events, providing at the same time its point of view on the names involved. The Secret Police admits that they have fought or eliminated in many ways the political opponents, who are referred to by terms like *saboteurs*, *war criminals*, *people's enemies*, *spies*, *bandits*, *kulaks*, etc., in their confronts both had losses. All this is given directly through the evidence of the State Security Service, which provides information on the execution sites, but without giving exact coordinates (!).

A list compiled by the Interior Ministry before the collapse of the communist regime counted 3,031 people killed without trial. The Institute of Former Political Persecuted estimates in its data 106 women executed or died in prison. Family members today can seek clarification of the fate of their relatives, pursuant to the scope of law 45/2015, as amended, for missing persons.

The revision of 19 official historical record books was a beginning of urging academics to open all the documents, to delve into the research in the archives, in order to present all sides of the history, of those judged under communism, tried without trial, dead in the investigation premises and others who still today need to be revealed and get to know their true activity.

The exhibition on Sigurimi and its violence, was opened on the International Day of the Disappeared, aimed to tell the story of the victims of communism, limiting itself to the victims that come out from official historical records, identified – through various names, known or unknown, – the total summarizes the methods of persecution used by the State Security Service over the years, i.e. methods used to capture opponents, from the invention of diseases to the ‘combinations’ accepted by the Security staff themselves, through “legends” that imply the spread of false news, “lightning-like investigations” where are accepted “the traps” “beatings”, therefore shedding light, on the recruitment ways of collaborators done under coercion, through the pressure of the arrest of family members, or looking the child tied upside down in a cell.

The reports did not have their complete story, they were the version written and accepted by State Security Service.

A version *not destroyed*, as other important documents of Sigurimi, that raises many questions about the way the crimes are explained, accepted, and written.

In the documents displayed or cited, the terminology used for political opponents, arrested, or killed, was harsh. They were labeled as *criminals, spies, traitors to the homeland, degenerate, or with low morals*, therefore reading the documentation required very special care and awareness since they contained tough layers of communist ideology.

State Security Service spoke with the language of power, with the political approach of the time when man was important as a living body, easily commanded and manipulated.

Having this important unilateral material, – with reports and information, suggested or fabricated, that had to be considered historically, surely opposed by the different groups of interest on documentary bases, – Authority had to deepen the public debate on files, with authentic files which shared wide information on violence and torture.

The enormous exhibition *Sigurimi in its own words* was presented at the garden of the Prime Minister's office, at the center of Tirana, putting on a crossroad (literally and symbolically) a big problem of post-communist Albanian society, dealing with the past for transparency and truth, using secret materials of archives and files, that had to be compared and verified, in order to be accepted.

This brought once again the past into our present, putting into discussion the documents of Sigurimi and inviting people and researchers to contribute to a new public memory, based on facts, comparison, and exchange of information.

V.

My last months at the Authority were the ones when the controversy surrounding 'I.M.', widely speculated to be former President Ilir Meta, put on the table once again the case of collaborators of Sigurimi.

The Authority on Files informed Albanian Parliament in July of 2022 that a senior official with the initials 'I.M.' had worked as a Sigurimi informer. The I.M. controversy generated considerable political controversy and public debate among ordinary Albanians³.

³ Balkan Insight, "'Secret police informer' claims spark political bust-up in Albania', 2 August 2022, <<https://balkaninsight.com/2022/08/02/secret-police-informer-claims-spark->

The Authority on Files, five years after its creation, demonstrated to have a strong impact and it increased capacities to extract information from its archive.

The Sigurimi files were starting to speak back to the Albanian public and its political establishment, raising public awareness about the past.

This situation brought to significant changes and improvements to the law 45/2015 of Authority and the activity of research and education. Art. 36 of the law has been amended in view of civil education and informing the younger generation, now stating that the Authority cooperates with the national museums of memory, making available to the institutions of cultural heritage, the archival documentation that it has and cooperates with them for clarifying the truth of the crimes of communism; and supports the organization of school visits, encouraged and suggested by Ministry of Education, as part of the annual program, to places of memory on historical commemorative days.

On I. M. debate, once again the media pretended short and clear information on the file and documents that proved that the informer I. M. who spied on his university friend was or not the ex-president of Albania, one of the members of the youth movement of December 1990, then head of Socialist Youth, Prime Minister of Albania, Spokesperson of Albanian Parliament, and President of the country. *Yes or no?*

Once again, the authentic files of Sigurimi, although a limited legacy of the secret police, had to pass the test of believability in the era of fast information and social media.

As before, transparency was not enough, research, study, and comparison of documents was needed to have a professional answer, protecting the personal data of the persons involved and respecting human dignity.

In this case, as in others, answers could be found in the authentic documents or in the destroying reports of Sigurimi, reading through the lines or unraveling the elements of oppression and hate that transform a file into an instrument.

The remaining files that the Albanian Authority preserves in its archives are authentic and untouched.

Their content and the information they provide to interested researchers and scholars have to be studied and compared to other documents, testimonies, and witnesses, to understand the mechanisms of totalitarian systems to maintain and inherit power, to control the present and the future.

The research results serve the truth and lead to reflection, integration, apologies, healing, and reconciliation, preventing acts of totalitarianism in the future.

Dealing with the past in Albania means addressing layers upon layers of buried and hidden truths, silences, and traumas.

I left Authority aiming to be a “national memory institute”, which goes beyond managing the Sigurimi archive, but also works on and makes available additional historical sources, including oral testimonies. An institution that would have investigative powers and be able to collect additional information from witnesses and individuals who are identified in the files.

These processes are complex and unpredictable. But they are very necessary to move society forward. Without coming to terms with its communist past, the democratic transition in Albania will remain incomplete.

Formal institutions and rules can be reformed, redesigned, or re-invented to fit international templates of democracy, anti-corruption, and the rule of law. However, the practices and perceptions of both state and society are deeply enmeshed in the past, which informs the present and future. Initiatives to deal with the past in Albania are thus not only an effort to do justice to the past and its victims, but an investment in the country’s political future within Europe.

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Curriculum vitae

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The walls within. A survey on the archive of the former Albanian Secret Police *Sigurimi*

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Abstract

This article is an analysis of the original documents filed in the archives of Sigurimi, the Albanian State Secret Police, from 1945 to 1991 about the 'enemies of the Party' sent to the internment camps of Lushnja, a small town in central Albania. These files were made available by the Albanian Authority of Information on Former State Security Files. The detailed reports by the secret services officers and informants disclose the ferocity endured by generations who were deprived of personal freedoms and suffered persecutions for almost 50 years. The original documents are testimony of the incalculable psychological damage inflicted to people who live in total isolation and in constant fear.

Keywords

Albania; Secret Police Sigurimi; files; Internment camps; Informants.

Riassunto

Questo articolo è un'analisi dei documenti originali depositati negli archivi della Sigurimi, la Polizia segreta di Stato albanese, dal 1945 al 1991 sui 'nemici del Partito' inviati nei campi di internamento di Lushnja, una piccola cittadina dell'Albania centrale. Questi file sono stati resi disponibili dall'Autorità Albanese per l'informazione sui documenti degli ex Servizi Segreti. I resoconti dettagliati degli agenti e degli informatori dei servizi segreti rivelano la ferocia subita da generazioni che sono state private delle libertà personali e hanno subito persecuzioni per quasi 50 anni. I documenti sono testimonianza dell'incalcolabile danno psicologico inflitto a persone che vivono in totale isolamento e nella costante paura.

Parole chiave

Albania; Polizia Segreta Sigurimi; dossiers; campi di internamento; informatori.

1. *The walls within.* - 2. *Analysis of translated material.* - 3. *Curriculum vitae.*

For 50 years, post-World War II Albania remained the loyal Stalinist stronghold in the Eastern European block and Enver Hoxha its undiscussed leader until the day of his death in April 1985. Other than its existence on the map, very little was

known about this small country of around 3 million people in the heart of Europe. Albania was a locked down country, persistently defending itself from the outside enemies, a country filled with bunkers, prisons and labor camps in which entire families and their relatives were displaced.

The European Union-funded project “Face Up. Faces from the Past: The fight and democracy during the regime oh Hoxha” constitutes another important piece added to the long overdue effort to come to terms with the past and recognize the atrocities of the communist regime in Albania. The combined work of different academic institutions and NGOs explored and brought to light the tragic and painful truth of the politically persecuted prisoners of an open-air labor camp in the village of Saver. 27 survivors and their family members gave articulated long verbal testimonies about their life in the labor camp.

The Albanian Authority of Former State Security Files began its work in 2016, 25 years after the fall of the regime. Once the consent of the survivors was obtained, I could go through the dossiers that the representatives of the party and the state secret police kept through the years about each and every one of them. What emerges is an effective and highly repressive method, impregnated with hard-line ideology, and rooted in abuse of power and fear. It was a wall within the country as strong as the one made of armed guards that isolated the country from outside.

A long strand of ink testifies the ferocity of the regime, the consistency and the determination of its representatives to keep the power and to fight the enemies of the communist party for 46 long years (1945-1991). A thorough analysis of each case through the eyes of the perpetrators reveals, above all, the infinite human strength and the sense of survival under unimaginable circumstances. What makes Saver’s story tragically unique is the duration of these atrocities: lives of generations deprived of personal freedoms, and subjected to discrimination and persecutions, for almost 50 years. How do we measure the psychological damage of generations living in total isolation and in constant fear?

This is a story of oppression, of isolation and sadness, and at the same time, of extreme endurance and strength.

1. *The walls within*

Albania is among the victors of the Second World War and positions itself with conviction in the communist bloc of the East. The substantial economic aid guaranteed by the Soviet Union and China gave Albania an unprecedented impetus for reconstruction. The image of post-WWII Albania is that of a country that emerges from the darkness of poverty and backwardness and sets out towards a path of progress and development, industrialization, literacy, education, the right to health care and women's rights. Meanwhile, however, the regime begins to take shape. Private property is abolished, the agrarian reform is about to be completed and will expropriate the large landowners, giving rise to a forced collectivization of agriculture.

The dictatorship of the proletariat and the class struggle form the basis of the new regime. Power is concentrated in the hands of one man, Enver Hoxha, who was the head of a single mass party, the Socialist People's Party of Albania. The Albanian communist dictatorship was built around two pillars: *the Propaganda* used to shape minds, glorifying the Marxist-Leninist ideology and raise the cult of the individual (the cult of religion was banned and in 1967 Albania became the only atheist country in the world) and *the repression of dissent* aimed at annihilate any individual freedom by creating a system of prisons and internment camps throughout the country.

The tool to ensure a stringent control over the life of citizens becomes Sigurimi, the secret police formally called the "State Security Directorate". Sigurimi, the true iron fist of the party, repressed any form of dissent and monitored the "ideological conduct" of citizens. Born in 1944 on the Yugoslav model with the motto "For the People, with the People", it was composed of the most faithful fighters for liberation and operated initially under the guidance of the Ministry of Defence. In March 1946 it passed under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. From its headquarters in Tirana it reached all 26 districts of Albania, branching out to the most remote villages. In addition to political control, censorship, public archives, the physical safety of people, counterintelligence and intelligence, Sigurimi also dealt with internment and prison camps.

This political and social system is the object of the research of the European Union Project "Face Up: Faces from the past. The fight for freedom and democracy during the regime of Hoxha". The oral testimonies of survivors reveal a life in terror filled with distrust, hatred, fear and resignation. To examine the story in all

its details and bring to light in its entirety the control system of Sigurimi – shield and sword of the Party – this work focuses on a reflection on the repressive model of the Albanian Socialist Party and the analysis of declassified documents of the former Albanian secret police made available by the newly founded (in 2016) “Authority of the Sigurimi Dossiers”.

This requires first a clarification on the meaning of recurring expressions and keywords in the papers.

The slogans “Glory to the Party of Labor”, “Long live Marxism-Leninism”, or “Always vigilant against the enemy of the people”, “Death to the traitors”, coexisted with words like: *Biography* (a bad one meant any person who had at least one family member considered enemy of the Party); *Internment*, was a constraining measure of physical removal from one’s belonging environment and uprooting from one’s social protection network; *Agitation and Propaganda*, the crime par excellence which sanctioned the condemnation of political prisoners; *Norma*: word used in factory work or in agricultural fields which indicated the established volume of work to be carried out in a day.

2. Analysis of translated material

We are southeast of the capital Tirana, in the Myzeqe plain, which has become the country’s granary after the important reclamation works that have transformed the once swampy fields into agricultural cooperatives. Saver, Gjaze, and Gradishta, today villages with a few narrow streets dividing a few low turned-into-houses barracks, are just some of the small gulags filled by dismantled families: mostly grandmothers, wives and little children. Young adults and husbands, trying to escape the communist revenge, had fled abroad or had been executed by hasty trials after the liberation: former senior employees of the governments of King Zog or of the period of occupation by the fascists; anti-communist intellectuals; former landowners and clerics and, in some cases, even foreign nationals. The party made a clean sweep of all opponents and at the same time made sure to punish the rest of the family without exception: children, brothers, sisters, spouses and cousins.

Life flowed in apparent freedom for the internees. There were no walls or fences. Once uprooted, isolated and spied on incessantly the walls rose tall inside, their foundation built in distrust and fear.

The dossiers consulted (about 350 pages composed of photos, typed or handwritten documents) are a collection of detailed reports from the Sigurimi

officers assigned to these villages, and of notes, memos, decrees or formal decisions sent by the Center to the section. *The mission* of Sigurimi is clear: keep the interned families isolated, controlling every moment of their life. The sanctions inflicted did not aim at re-education or reintegration into social and working life, but were perpetual, purely restrictive and punitive measures, as well as exemplary to intimidate and show others the total power of the regime. The decision of internment was reviewed every 5 years and promptly renewed. The anguish and the humiliation caused were incalculable. To *realize* this mission, an essential requirement of the officers of Sigurimi was their absolute loyalty and total obedience to the Party, as was the perfidy and the cunning necessary to manage the sources and information that were definitely plentiful. The *space* was very small and therefore easy to control: work, home, free time – possibilities of movement null. The *Work* went on in agricultural cooperatives regardless of everyone's training and level of education. The internees were not only isolated, they were also subjected to humiliation and were stripped of dignity. The head of the agricultural brigade was assigned by the party, a faithful member of the Party, with an excellent 'biography' and an immaculate past. The *free time* was spent in the grocery store, in the queues for water, in the meetings called by the party on the occasion of important announcements. Their *Home*, instead of being a safe space, became the most favorable environment for the activity of informers and spies who reported every event, detail, word, gesture, even the visits received on occasions of joy or mourning – everything. The list of informants and agents, from what emerges from the dossiers, exceeded that of friends and relatives. The documents are written in formal and pedantic language, and some phrases are endlessly repeated to describe the enemy who continually engages in "political misbehavior" or engages in "enemy activity", "sabotage", and "agitation and propaganda against the Party".

When you open a declassified Sigurimi dossier, the sensation, even after many re-readings, is always the same: that of being in front of a work of fiction. Nothing further from reality. Everyone – observed or observer – is a real person: their names are real ones, in code or nicknames. Each file describes daily life down to the smallest detail, even the most intimate moments of its protagonists, or rather its representation made by its editors, equally important protagonists of the dossier.

File nr. 798 contains 180 pages, 89 documents from 1962 to 1991 and opens with the photo of *Lazer Radi*. He has white hair, certainly taken towards the last years of his stay in Saver. Follows a detailed list of his family nucleus made up of a few

people: his wife Vitka (her name is Vitore, but she is mentioned as Vitka in all the reports), his son Jozef, his sister Lucia, his brothers Anton and Balto who lived in Tirana and all his friends and acquaintances, with a note alongside specifying the reason for the internment for example: previously in prison, connected to somebody that had fled the country, etc . Then there is another list, that of the officers, operatives and supervisors of the Sigurimi Section which has 10 people. At the end, the list of pseudonyms of agents and informants. In the case of Lazer Radi, seven are listed: five informants, 'Bushi', 'Effort', 'Citizen', 'Valiant' and 'Tiger', and two agents, 'Apparatus' and 'Observer'.

A key figure in this microcosm made of spies, notes, information, decrees, and instructions is the Sigurimi officer in charge of the village. In the case of Lazer Radi there are two over the years: Captain Llazar Gogu and Captain Selfo Islami. Their supervisor is Section Chief Kosta Ndini.

Lazer Radi was sent to the Lushnja camps in July 1954. He had spent the last 10 years in prison. Radi was born in 1916 in Prizren, Yugoslavia. He moved with his family to Tirana in 1929, when he was still a child. After completing elementary and middle school, he won a scholarship to study law at the "La Sapienza" University in Rome. He returned to Tirana as a young graduate and began working as a journalist. He was hired in April 1943 as a translator and interpreter at the Lieutenancy headed by Francesco Jacomini, an Italian diplomat who from 1939 to 1943, with the role of Lieutenant General, was *de facto* viceroy of the Kingdom of Albania, in the period of the fascist occupation. Radi writes for various Albanian newspapers and magazines and publishes a book: *Fascism and the Albanians*. His fate after the war is sealed: it is that of the defeated. He suffered the revenge of the communists when in 1944, after his liberation, the Special Court sentenced him to the maximum penalty, 30 years in prison. He was freed in 1954 thanks to an amnesty, and after some attempts to find employment in Tirana, as a worker and as a translator at a publishing house, he was sent to internment along with his family. Lazer had married Vitka in 1942 (we read in the papers that she too was sentenced to 8 years accused of being an agent of the Yugoslavs). From 1960 they would live in Saver. Radi worked first as a carpenter and later he would only work in the agricultural fields. He is accused of sabotage when, while he was on guard duty in agricultural fields, the belts of a German-made thresher broke (document no. 69 of 3 May 1976). Sigurimi's operative is informed of Radi's past and in each report he condenses his 'biography' into two paragraphs, before recounting the specific episode as reported by his informants, who are evidently

people close to Radi, people who visit his house, who always find an excuse to meet him and make him talk. The informants do not neglect any detail, they tell where the meeting took place, outside or in which house, what they ate, they describe Radi's state of mind, even the language he communicates in with his wife (often Yugoslav) in order to not be understood by the children (doc. 87 of 20 August 1981).

Each report is essentially a redaction by Sigurimi's operative of the information received from the source to which he himself had given instructions. It is always drawn up on the same model: who received the information, the pseudonym of the agent who delivered it, the date and the place. The story of the specific episode opens with the following sentence "The source reports that ...". At the end, each dispatch is completed with comments relating to the foreseen items: *Notes*, *Clarifications*, *Instructions* to the source for the next assignment and ends with the *Operational Measures* that constantly established the inclusion of the report in the dossier of the monitored object and in those of all the mentioned.

Through these often repetitive communiques, we get to know Lazer Radi, the man. Radi was a fairly reserved man, cultured and studious, he spoke various foreign languages, loved to read, and was constantly updated on the country's situation and the international state of affairs. He followed the political life of the country with consistency and passion and commented on current events, many times unaware that he was dealing with a spy.

In October 1962, Sigurimi placed him under category 2B surveillance for enemy activity. In May 1963, the Ministry of Internal Affairs decided to raise surveillance to category 2A. Lazer Radi "always listens to Ruggero Orlando, RAI correspondent from New York and other western radio broadcasts and defends Khrushchev as a man of peace" (document nr. 32 of 20 May 1963). Category 2A surveillance, meant he was going vertiginously close to the more serious crime of "agitation and propaganda against the Party".

When, after a conditional release, he tries unsuccessfully to move to Elbasan, he himself explains this concession to the spy: "I think Sigurimi no longer has any useful material from me here living in a small village, so they are ok with me going to a larger city, they can have more information coming from a wider circle of acquaintances" (document nr 49 of 29 July 1963). In 1967 he went back to surveillance 2B (document nr 59 of November 6, 1967).

Sigurimi's officer instructed his informants to ask Lazer's opinion after every important event such as the breakdown of relations with the Warsaw Pact

countries, the arrival of Brezhnev, Nixon's visit to China, Tito's illness, the fate of the Yugoslav Federation after the death of Tito, the suicide of Mehmet Shehu, or the beginning of the conflict in the Balkans. Radi has clear and solid opinions on what is happening in the world, he makes deep political reflections on both international and internal situation. The Sigurimi official seems almost obsessed to distance himself from the comments he is reporting about. After the death of Mehmet Shehu (Enver Hoxha's right hand man who commits suicide in 1981) when Radi reflects about the sense of rupture and conflict within the Party (document nr. 93 of 21 December 1981), the reaction of the officer, made clear on the instructions to the spy, is almost a self-defense, when he even suggests a hypothetical dialogue with Radi: through the words of the informant, he wants to remind Lazer – and his superiors who were reading the document – of how the Party has never been so strong and united (Document nr. 93 of 21 December 1981). After all, the officer knew that he himself was being watched. When Radi comments positively on an editorial by *Zeri i Popullit* on the attitude of the Albanian government towards the Yugoslav people and especially towards the Kosovars (document nr. 74 of February 5, 1980) Section Chief Col. Kosta Ndini warns the officer, with a handwritten note, to be vigilant, to never let go, and never forget that Lazer Radi is a sworn enemy of the party (document nr. 74 of 25 April 1980).

Radi no longer had hopes that his situation could change. We find him sad and resigned when he says: "every historical moment has its winners and losers, and we will always be the losers for this government" (Doc No. 46 of 12 February 1965). On the eve of each Party Congress, the hope that the party would decide to ease up on the class struggle were duly dashed. His desperation becomes palpable, however, when his son-in-law Dine is arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison (document No. 75 of 21 august 1980) which he considers "disproportionate and aimed only at isolating them more and more". Or the news of the arrest in 1980 of Nikolle Mernaci, who was around his own age: "I'm scared. He wasn't a close friend, but you never know, some word may have slipped" (document nr. 73 of 23 January 1980). As well as in the words of his wife Vitka in a report when she says that her husband "is afraid, is disturbed and hasn't slept since he learned of the arrest of Avdulla Nela", another internee who was incarcerated (document nr. 89 of 10/27/1981).

He had tried, over the years, to write to his friends in Italy or relatives in Yugoslavia. Sigurimi's Censorship Department made sure that this correspondence

never reached its destination. In fact, it was always opened and destroyed as indicated in the document nr. 129 of 10 December 1984 about the annihilation of all letters. The letters to the Italian friend Ugo Casanello of Brescia (document n. 44 of August 17, 1965), have become accusations of “possible agent of Italian intelligence”.

In October 1980 Sigurimi put Radi under 2A surveillance again, this time due to a “tendency” to “agitation and propaganda” (document 109 of October 13, 1980). The officer recommended striking the enemy Lazer Radi and, as he was in advanced age, suggested exposing and condemning him in front of the inhabitants of Saver for agitation and propaganda against the party and the people. He collects the evidence, calls witnesses and sets the date for the public condemnation which takes place on October 23, 1982. Radi was 66 years old. “This was a hard slap that I won’t forget easily” is how Lazer reacts while talking with another informant, “Citizen” (document nr 118 of 18 November 1982).

From this moment there are two salient events reported in the file: when in 1983 he passes again to 2B (document 123 of 5 March 1983) and when his son-in-law Dine Dine is released from prison in 1987 and goes to visit him in Saver.

The last document in the dossier is dated December 28, 1991: The request to close and archive the dossier on Lazer Radi.

The Miraka family is another one that finished up in the internment camps immediately after the liberation. They were a few families mainly composed of grandmothers, daughters and young daughters-in-law with small children. The husbands, some fled abroad, others executed by the Communists.

The dossier nr. 2945 belongs to Lek Miraka. Lek was born in 1943. He was just over 1 year old when his father fled to Italy. He paid the price for this event for all the years to come up to 1991. The first document in his dossier is a report on his life (document nr. 3 of June 28, 1977). Lek was 34 years old, married and with children. Him, his mother Gina and his brother Moisi were under category 2B surveillance.

His father, Kol Miraka, became Minister of Internal Affairs during the Italian occupation. Born in Iballa di Puka, a town in northern Albania, he came from a wealthy peasant Catholic family. Kol Miraka (who died later in the United States in 1968) and his brother Pal managed to reach Italy immediately after the war. His son Ndoc had died in the attempt as well as his brother Pashuk. They leave their mother, sisters and wives with their very young children in Albania.

Gina Miraka, wife of Kol, together with their two very young children, Lek and Moisi, began the journey of internment. First to Berat, then to Tepelena and finally

they arrive in Gradishta, a small village between Lushnja and Fier. This is the first document of the dossier: the 'biography' of Lek (document 3 of 28 June 1977). Lek only obtains a high school diploma and does not have access to university studies because he is the son of the 'criminal' Kol Miraka. He worked at the agricultural cooperative 'November 29' in Gradishta. He is married to Dolores, daughter of a former general of the army (who was declared an enemy of the Party in 1956) and a Spanish mother. Lek and Dolores have 3 children.

Sigurimi's officer, Ajaz Ferraj becomes his shadow. His early reports focus on describing Lek as someone who always complained about the large amount of work, a "norm" according to him that was not achievable and, above all, useless considering the poor pay received. This aspect of the "unfinished" task takes up a large part of the reports in the dossier. It becomes the focus of the accusations against Lek who thus "sabotaged" the production of the cooperative. He believed, according to the information of the spies, it was pointless to work so much since the pay would have remained the same. He mobilized the other workers to join him in not realizing the "norm". Officer Ferraj keeps this line of investigation alive and instructs the agent to meet often and ask him what he thinks of the country's economic situation (document nr 13, 23 december 1976)

For each of the informants, Sigurimi sent a detailed action plan, with precise deadlines for setting up the surveillance program (document 18 of 20 July 1977).

On November 7, 1977, Lek Miraka was subjected to category 2A surveillance for agitation and propaganda and for sabotage of agricultural production work.

Lek and his brother Moisi grew up in the camps, their closest friends live in the village: Naim Staravecka, the Previzi brothers, the Dosti brothers. They are seen with annoyance, envy and resentment, and described as stubborn and full of themselves, only because they are children of important people in the past (document 23 of 21 September 1977). The instructions are rigid: "stay close to the group, sneak in in every possible way and try to understand what they do, what they say, who they meet" (document 30 of 12 January 1978). In document nr. 35 of 17 April 1978, the informant comments on Enver Hoxha's visit to Gjirokaster (the leader of the Communist Party Enver Hoxha's hometown). Lek and Naim believe that his speeches were strong and valid, but do not forget to comment on Tito's successful visit to the United States. "Tito was really good. They welcomed him very warmly". At this point the officer Ferraj writes long instructions to the spy and orders him to repeat to Miraka and Staravecka that "in reality Tito has not been as good as they think".

The risks of surveillance also extend to friends and acquaintances of the supervised. Naim Staravecka would end up in prison in the beginning of 1979 accused of “agitation and propaganda against the people’s party”. Sigurimi is very interested in the reaction of the friends and has them assiduously followed by the spies.

Another episode reveals the ferocity and cruelty of the methods used by Sigurimi to control people and extract information. In 1978, Kol’s uncle Pal Miraka died in exile in Italy. A very sad moment for the whole family, becomes a tempting opportunity for Sigurimi to get information. Lek and his brother don’t get permission to go to their cousins in Gjaze for condolences. In the meantime, Sigurimi coordinates with their office in Puka (the birthplace of the Mirakas), and has a person arrive from the north, but it is not clear from the report whether he is a friend or relative. We know his pseudonym is the informant ‘Crown’ The first visit he makes is to the sons of Pal, Sokol and Simon Miraka in Gjaze. They welcomed him with surprise because until now no one had been allowed to visit them. His excuse was that he came to Lushnja searching for necessary papers about his pension. The informant then goes to convey condolences for her brother-in law’s loss also to Gina, the mother of Lek and Moisi in Gradishta. Another informant ‘Korabi’, during his condolences visit, says to Gina: “it is sad, but as the proverb goes ‘away from the sight, away from the heart’” at which she replies that “the saddest thing is the fact that they died so far away. Your brothers, on the other hand, are young and one day, if things change, they will be able to return” (doc 33 of 22 February 1978). We deduce that ‘Korabi’ is also under some form of restriction, because his brothers have fled the country. He then asks “how did they get the news of Pal’s death?”, and “Do they know what Kol and Pal left them?” The aim is to understand, above all, how they receive the information. “A telegram from the cousins in the United States had brought the news”.

Lek’s brother, Moisi’s desperation is palpable when he “complains about the tightening of the restrictive measures” and says that “we cannot go more than 600 meters outside the village” (document 7 of 22 July 1973) or when he says: “we were born in internment and we’ve grown old here. We’re not even allowed to make condolence calls.” (doc 34 of 23 November 1978).

The affliction of the brothers is far from ending. In July of 1979 we learn that Lek’s brother Moisi Miraka is being arrested. We barely know him, although he is mentioned frequently in Officer Ferraj’s reports about Lek. We learn of the fact at the time of the search of his house. The officer cares to collect the reactions of his

mother Gina and Lek to the arrest of his brother. Lek is convinced that “the arrest is unjust and that they are paying only because of who their father was. It won’t be long till they arrest me too”. He fears, as the informant ‘Korabi’ reports, that their friend in prison “Naim Staravceka might have said something, but they would strongly deny anyway” (document 62 of 29 september 1979). These moments of brotherly anguish constitute yet another brick in the wall of accusations for agitation and propaganda against the Party. The process is accelerated and the noose tightens: “It is urgent to collect more documentation, all the testimonies, the letters of the brigade chief (the denouncement of 13 July 1979) and start the investigative process to hit him hard”.

Correspondence with superiors regarding Lek’s arrest is very detailed with precise instructions on the moment and method of Lek’s arrest. It has to happen during the day, at the place of work, the officers should be armed, and immediately a perquisition of his house has to be carried out to search for further evidence. In fact, it happened on July 26, 1979. In the meantime, Sigurimi carefully decides to have some of the informants moved away so as “not to burn them and nor raise suspicions about them” (document nr 71 22 december 1979). In January 1980 Lek was sentenced to 10 years on charges of “agitation and propaganda against Socialism with the purpose of weakening the State and dictatorship of the proletariat”. At this moment the work of Operative Ajaz Ferraj was concluded. He closes the dossier and sends it back to the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Out of prison in 1987 Lek returns to Gradishta. In the eyes of the party he has not yet paid his dues, the guilt for being the son of a minister at the time of fascism. We are not aware of the fate of officer Ferraj. We meet the new operative Bujar Laze who decides to reopen the Lek Miraka file (document nr 78 of 25 May 1987). He proposes surveillance 2B to the Ministry, considering Lek an enemy and an element to be kept under close observation. The old informants are reactivated. ‘The Globe’ reports what Lek keeps repeating that “both he and his brother were convicted unjustly and with false testimony, only because of his father. From now on I won’t talk, I have a family. I left my kids young and found them married” (document nr. 82 of 13 July 1987). There is another dispatch that tells about a random frisk done to Lek. The only thing reportable is his wedding ring with initials of his wife’s name Dolores and the day of their wedding engraved inside (document nr. 22 of 5 January 1989). Thus we arrive at the decree of 23 may 1991,

the moment of the fall of the communist empire, when his dossier is definitively archived.

In both stories the last documents that close the dossiers are the ones that provoke the most dismay. They are dry, more so than any other decree of the dossiers. Just two lines are enough to put an end to a life of deprivation and imprisonment, and to tear down in an instant a wall built on fear for so many years. There is a strong sense of injustice in seeing an entire existence reduced to a few pages, there is also a sense of helplessness in knowing that everything ultimately depends only on where and when you were born.

“The regime must be in serious trouble. There are two of us here and there is only one Sigurimi agent tailing us”. The popular story of the two brothers walking through Tirana in the late 1980s captures well the surprise about an inconceivable easing of controls in Enver Hoxha’s Albania, where half of the population watched over the other half. But the brother’s answer clarifies better how that of “total surveillance” was a system that went far beyond the rules to be respected until it became a condition of survival: “don’t worry, the Sigurimi spy is following me. I’m in charge of your surveillance, brother”.

The Albanian secret police spread terror and kept the regime going for 46 long years with devastating consequences for its own people, starting from those dead in prisons to those destroyed in internment camps, from those who during the way became enemies to all those who had lived under the illusion of a free life.

History has not been kind to the Albanians. According to a report published in 2016 by the Institute for Studies on Crimes and the Consequences of Communism (ISKK), there were 34,000 political prisoners in Albania, of which 26,768 were men and 7,367 were women. 60,000 interned in labor camps.

The words of Albanian writer Visar Zhiti, himself a victim of communist persecution, fully describe the communist terror: “The circles of Dante’s hell are something else. The terror there makes sense, there is strength and love, even dark beauty. In the Albanian hell, on the other hand, the circles are crooked and upset by ugly internments, absurd and banal suffering, banal hatred, banal persecution, where the weakest and certainly the most repugnant are the perpetrators and their spies, but even more their leaders and their party from the barbaric doctrine”.

3. Curriculum vitae

Alma Hado holds a degree in Italian literature from Tirana University which she followed up through collaborations with Georgetown University and “92Y” in NYC.

She progressively focused on international issues. A producer at Voice of America in Washington DC, she then joined Humpty Dumpty Institute as “UN Across America” project manager in NYC where she also authored articles for Italian newspapers. She has worked for the Italian Government at the Embassy in Tirana and for Italy’s rotating EU Presidency. At “Roma Tre” and Bari University she focused on inter-university cooperation in the Balkans.

Meeting the needs of Hoxha regime survivors: An analysis of the responsiveness of Albania's new democratic system

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Abstract

The fall of the communist regime ushered in a wave of hope and optimism across Albanian society, especially among survivors of labor camps, prisoners, and political detainees. This paper seeks to analyze the strategies adopted to assist and reintegrate these survivors into society, employing the social-ecological systems framework and Transitional Justice theory as its lens. In conclusion, it highlights the necessity of adopting a holistic approach that encompasses legal and policy reforms, alongside addressing social and psychological needs, to facilitate a seamless transition to a democratic society.

Keywords

Communism; Albania; Democracy; Transitional justice.

Riassunto

Il crollo del regime comunista ha portato un senso di speranza e ottimismo per la società albanese, in particolare per i sopravvissuti ai campi di lavoro, dei prigionieri e degli internati politici. Questo articolo si pone l'obiettivo di esaminare le misure implementate per supportare e integrare i sopravvissuti del regime attraverso la lente dell'approccio dei sistemi socio-ecologici e della teoria della giustizia transizionale. In conclusione esalta l'importanza di un approccio completo che includa misure legali e politiche, nonché supporto delle esigenze sociali e psicologiche, per garantire una transizione di successo verso una società democratica.

Parole chiave

Comunismo; Albania; democrazia; giustizia transizionale.

1. Introduction. - 2. Transitional Justice amidst Shock. - 3. Using Transitional Justice to Transition towards a Social-Ecological System. - 4. Methodology. - 5. Results. - 6. Conclusion. - 7. Bibliography. - 8. Curriculum Vitae.

1. Introduction

The period following the Second World War marked the beginning of a highly discussed socio-historical era in the evolution of Albanian society. From the war's conclusion until 1990, Albania found itself governed by one of the most oppressive regimes in its records. The authoritarian regime led by Hoxha was notorious for its brutal treatment of citizens, encompassing women, youths, and the elderly, who frequently faced inhumane practices including violence, imprisonment, exile, torture, and murder.

The transformative winds ushered in by totalitarian regimes across Central and Eastern Europe during the 1980s also challenged the remnants of Albania's dictatorial governance. The advocacy for regime change escalated into widespread popular movements by 1990, demanding a "We love Albania like all of Europe"—a symbolic plea embodying the desire for freedom and future progress. Similar to other nations within the former communist bloc of Central and Eastern Europe, Albania's transition was fraught with complex challenges in democracy consolidation.

Initial development practices predominantly focused on macro-social alterations, such as structural-functional changes within the government and economic systems. However, these approaches largely overlooked micro-level relationships, the reconciliation of past and present, and the rehabilitation of victims of communism. This oversight led to a societal and community milieu characterized more by an interindividual peace than by the collective "amnesia" often linked with peace efforts. The era of pluralist changes witnessed traits of authoritarianism, confusion, and short-term objectives. Instead of prioritizing the construction of a peaceful social fabric, "shock therapy" or "big-bang" models were implemented (Marangos, 2003 e 2004). The essence of the shock therapy model was to embrace neo-liberal economic policies, transitioning from closed to more open economies (Berend - Bugaric, 2015). Nonetheless, studies have shown that this transition model led to substantial economic, political, social, and cultural ramifications, inducing severe social disruptions with enduring consequences for the implementing countries (Pusca, 2007; Alam - Nguyen - Majumdar, 2009).

The transition from communism to democracy in Albania ought to incorporate, among other elements, the political determination to hold accountable those who supported, promoted, and perpetrated crimes under the communist regime. The post-communist transition should extend beyond mere geopolitical reorientation and Westernization of former communist societies, aspiring instead to foster social peace through Transitional Justice. This approach aims to address the legacy of

human rights violations, facilitating efforts to punish, purge, and hold the dictatorial elite accountable. Moreover, it seeks to assist victims in reclaiming their dignity, lost property, and societal status (Jusufović *et al.*, 2021).

Even though three decades have passed since the adoption of the shock therapy model, Albanian society still demonstrates a clear lack of genuine political will to confront past issues in relation to the present. Justice for the victims has often taken various forms, yet the processes have been opaque, characterized by a widespread hesitancy to recognize the importance of transitional justice. This recognition is crucial for creating an environment that supports the recovery of individuals persecuted during the dictatorship era.

This article explores key aspects of post-communist legal changes aimed at positively impacting the rehabilitation process of communism's victims through a Transitional Justice and Ecological System approach. The impact of post-communist developments on rehabilitating victims of communism will be examined from the survivors' perspective. This study endeavors to address the challenges faced by Albanian society in transition, particularly in recognizing, rehabilitating, integrating, and compensating the victims of communism. It aims to explore the impact of perceived interventions on the victims of the dictatorial regime and assess how transitional governments have advanced towards reconciliation with history and among parties.

2. Transitional Justice amidst Shock

Recent studies on the impact of pluralistic developments in countries of the former communist bloc indicate a narrowing gap between the East and West in macro-social indicators such as market dynamics, freedom, rights, gender equality, inclusion, democracy, and social security (Fuchs-Schündeln - Schündeln, 2020). However, the outcomes of transitioning from communism to democracy differ among the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. In these countries, democratic indicators are frequently jeopardized by the authoritarian inclinations of political leaders and the manipulation of democratizing reforms (Berend - Bugarić, 2015).

Similar to other former communist countries, democratization reforms in Albania sought to address the needs of survivors of labor camps, political exiles, and imprisonments, and to reevaluate their denied rights. Nonetheless, Albania's transition during the era of pluralistic developments has resulted in a social environment marked by widespread cultural delays. The initial social changes in

the democratization process primarily catered to the demand for comprehensive reforms in governance, economic systems, and institutional development. These reforms were implemented through radical legal changes and developments.

Sociological studies frequently examine social transformations and their dynamics through the lens of the Cultural Lag theory. This theory suggests that social change is marked by diverging developments between material culture and non-material culture (Ogburn, 1957). The adoption of the shock therapy model in the early stages of Albania's transition towards democracy heightened the risk of disproportionate changes between legal (material) culture and the nation's capacity to effectively tackle inherited issues from the past and forge a conflict-free social environment. Legal changes in Albania often exhibit symptoms of Cultural Lag, failing to meet or satisfy the needs and expectations of the community they intend to serve.

According to data from the Institute for the Integration of the Persecuted since 1993, there are 42,772 individuals¹ identified as political convicts and persecuted. Furthermore, the Institute of Crime Studies and the Consequences of Communism reports 34,135 political prisoners, 59,009 individuals interned in labor camps, 984 Albanians who died in regime prisons, 6,027 individuals executed during the regime, 308 individuals who lost their mental health while imprisoned, and 7,022 individuals who died in labor camps².

To address the distorted social relations inherited from the communist era, legislators in the early years of pluralistic changes and subsequently have undertaken dedicated legal measures focusing on the victims of the communist regime. In Albanian society, efforts and legal interventions for the rehabilitation of those persecuted by the regime are organized into four main areas.

First Direction: *Recognition of the Status of Victims of Persecution and Political Punishment*. Following the collapse of communism, Albania gradually integrated into international organizations by ratifying fundamental United Nations documents, including the 1985 "Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" (ratified by Law No. 7727, dated 30.06.1993). According to this United Nations declaration, individuals

¹ Insituti për Integrimin e të përndjekurve, Statistika: Instituti Ish të përndjekurit politikë | STATISTIKA (ishperndjekurit.gov.al)

² Insituti për Integrimin e të përndjekurve, Statistika: Instituti Ish të përndjekurit politikë | STATISTIKA (ishperndjekurit.gov.al)

persecuted, convicted, and killed during the communist regime are recognized as victims of crime and abuse of power.

As a testament to the recognition of the victims of communism, the first government formed after the pluralist elections in March 1991 enacted Law No. 7514, dated 30.09.1991, titled "On the Innocence, Amnesty, and Rehabilitation of Ex-Convicts and Politically Persecuted Individuals". This legislation acknowledged the injustices suffered by those persecuted and provided for their rehabilitation and financial compensation. This legal framework marked a significant initial step towards acknowledging the status of victims and facilitating their rehabilitation within Albanian society. (Official Bulletin of the Republic of Albania, No. 7, p. 3233, 1991, subsequently amended by Law No. 7660, dated 14.01.1993, Official Bulletin of the Republic of Albania No. 1, page 11, 1993; further amended by Law No. 7719, dated 8.6.1993, Official Bulletin of the Republic of Albania No. 9, p. 923, 1993).

The initial legal measure acknowledging the illegitimacy of political punishments under the new political framework was Law No. 7514, dated 30.09.1991, titled "On the Innocence, Amnesty, and Rehabilitation of Ex-Convicts and Politically Persecuted" (Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania, No. 7, p. 3233, 1991). This law underwent subsequent amendments: Law No. 7660, dated 14.01.1993 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania, No. 1, page 11, 1993), and Law No. 7719, dated 8.6.1993 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania, No. 9, p. 923, 1993).

Continuing the legal initiatives for ex-convicts and politically persecuted individuals, Law No. 7748, dated 29.07.1993, "On the Status of Ex-Convicts and Politically Persecuted by the Communist System" was enacted.

The essential criteria and conditions for acquiring the status of convicted and politically persecuted individuals, determining their treatment forms, were established by Law No. 7748, dated 29.07.1993 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania, No. 10, p. 678, 1993), and later amended by Law No. 8665, dated 18.9.2000 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Albania, No. 31, page 1578, 2000).

A significant milestone was reached in 2007 with the acknowledgment of the disappeared during the communist era and their destinies, marking a crucial contribution to the enactment of the UN International Convention "For the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances" (Law No. 9802, dated 13.9.2007).

The second direction focuses on the rehabilitation and assessment of the status of those persecuted. During a period of rapid political shifts, political parties concurred on recognizing the atrocities committed during the communist era as acts of genocide and crimes against humanity, motivated by political, religious, and ideological grounds (Law 8001, dated 22.09.1995). In the same year, the political resolve to expel former communist regime functionaries from the pluralistic political elite was manifested through the enactment of Law 8043, dated 30.11.1995, "On the Verification of the Backgrounds of Officials and Other Persons Affiliated with the Protection of the Democratic State" (Official Bulletin of the Republic of Albania, No. 26, p. 1139, 1995).

The Albanian transition via shock therapy led to various contradictions within social realities, a phenomenon observed across many nations of the former communist bloc. The resulting unstable, fragile, and perilous social environment compelled individuals to engage in pathological behaviors such as withdrawal, distraction, normalization, corruption, and the creation of illusory perceptions of a new form of social solidarity (Pusca, 2007). In this milieu, dialogue between the past and the future seemed unattainable, as even opposing factions struggled to navigate the tumultuous changes.

Third Direction: Assistance, Compensation, and Reparation for Victims. Since the regime change, successive governments have incorporated into their political agendas the issue of compensating former political prisoners and victims of the communist regime. A comprehensive legal framework has been developed to facilitate compensation for these individuals. Financial compensation has emerged as the most prevalent form of reparation offered by the legislature. Compensation covers a range of injustices, including years spent in imprisonment under unjust sentences, loss of relatives, and loss of property, such as forests, agricultural lands, and meadows. Various laws and bylaws have been implemented to ensure appropriate compensation for the victims, including Law No. 7598 dated 1.9.1992, Decision No. 40 dated 29.1.1993, Decision No. 504 dated 18.10.1993, Law No. 9831 dated 12.11.2007, and Law No. 7699 dated 21.4.1993.

The goal of these legislative and regulatory measures is to provide financial compensation by the Albanian state to the surviving political prisoners of the communist regime, their families, and those interned in labor camps. This effort represents a commitment by the democratic state to acknowledge and address the crimes of the totalitarian communist regime and to improve the lives of the victims. Additionally, certain legal actions have been directed at facilitating the

social integration of the victims, addressing issues such as pensions, education, qualifications, housing, and employment (Decision No. 184, dated 4.5.1994).

The fourth direction entails the establishment of institutions dedicated to researching, documenting, and addressing the crimes of communism to aid in the integration and rehabilitation of the regime's victims. Beyond the national legal framework designed to compensate and support the victims of communism and their families, the Republic of Albania has instituted a legal framework focused on integrating former persecuted individuals, systematically studying the crimes of communism, managing the files of the formerly persecuted, and locating missing persons. Within this legal framework, institutions such as the Institute for the Integration of the Formerly Politically Persecuted (Law No. 8246, dated 1.10.1997), the Institute for the Studies of Communist Crimes and Consequences (Law No. 10242, dated 25.2.2010), and the Authority for Access to Information on Former State Security Documents (Law 45/2015) have been established. These entities are tasked with steering Albanian society towards recognizing and addressing human rights abuses and fostering dialogue among groups with a history of antagonism. They serve as platforms for truth-telling and play a crucial role in preventing potential destabilization within society.

The past often appears to be a peripheral concern in the electoral agendas of politicians, and Albanian society continues to face challenges in reconciling with its history. In this context, the legal reforms and actions undertaken to rectify past wrongs underscore the persistent obstacles to Albania's development. Research on transitional societies like Albania highlights the significance of fortifying transitional justice mechanisms. The initiatives undertaken by Albanian legislation and practice in confronting historical injustices resonate with Weber's (2012) notion of trading justice for political stability. These strategies give precedence to the broad and conceptual facets of justice over ensuring "adequate justice" for individual victims.

3. Using Transitional Justice to Transition towards a Social-Ecological System

In the realm of social science and interdisciplinary studies, the concept of social organization is frequently related to an ecological system, wherein social actors engage at various tiers of social systems and subsystems (Colding - Barthel, 2019; Keels, 2022; Neal - Neal, 2013). The relationships within these social-ecological systems are interconnected, with each being directly or indirectly influenced by

social interactions. Such social transformations and transitions exert a profound effect on social-ecological systems, steering groups and societies towards bolstered resilience (Stone-Jovicich *et al.*, 2018).

This study investigates into the application of transitional justice in the shift towards a social-ecological system framework. By acknowledging, rehabilitating, integrating, and compensating victims of environmental injustices, transitional justice plays a pivotal role in enhancing the resilience of social-ecological systems. Furthermore, transitional justice aids in the establishment of institutions and mechanisms dedicated to promoting environmental stewardship and sustainable development, paving the way for a society characterized by greater equity and justice.

As previously emphasized, the regime shift and the radical overhaul of social systems under the shock therapy model in 1990 significantly jeopardized the stability of social-ecological systems within Albanian society. In these challenging times, transitional governments were tasked with prioritizing social sources of renewal and reorganization to preserve the inherent connections among individuals, organizations, agencies, and institutions. Yet, the transition period from communism to democracy, along with subsequent democratic administrations, appears to have marginally addressed the critical reassessment of the roles of victims of communism and their victimizers within a democratic society. Folke *et al.* (2005) argue that legislation and government policies focused on resolving past conflicts, fostering cooperation, and cultivating a resilient social-ecological system could have turned the crisis into an opportunity to build bridges between previously conflicting communities and groups.

Holling (1973) defines resilience as the capacity of a system to maintain functional relationships despite significant environmental disturbances triggered by external factors. Transitional changes pose a formidable challenge that can destabilize the social fabric; therefore, resilience emerges as a vital attribute that enhances community resilience, safeguarding the social-ecological systems that underpin human relationships (Faulkner *et al.*, 2018).

From this perspective, transitional governments in Albanian society have not significantly contributed as they potentially could have. Their role in facilitating the ecological integration of social relations within a democracy, especially among groups with memories of past communist conflicts, has been limited. In a social-ecological context, the interplay between individuals and their environments should promote healthy and interdependent interactions (Ungar, 2002). Research

underscores the importance of social sources of resilience in navigating crises and reorganizing the social-ecological environment, advocating for adaptive governance that fosters collaborative systems, trust, leadership, appreciation of social capital, and social memory (Folke *et al.*, 2005).

A development paradigm that can be adopted to establish social-ecological systems in transitioning societies is Transitional Justice. This approach entails the formulation of comprehensive strategies designed to reconcile the current state of affairs with the legacy of extensive past abuses, ensuring accountability for perpetrators in the pursuit of justice for victims, and fostering reconciliation (Greiff, 2012; Leebaw, 2008; Webber, 2012). Implementing such a strategy demands cross-sectoral and multi-level engagement to cultivate the ecology of social systems.

The processes and mechanisms that support transitional justice are complex. They include criminal prosecutions through human rights trials focused on retributive justice, reparations for victims, and restorative justice. Additionally, they involve amnesties, truth-seeking initiatives, institutional reforms, vetting, and dismissals, or an appropriate mix of these strategies (Yusufi *et al.*, 2021; Olsen *et al.*, 2010). The pursuit of transitional justice is geared towards establishing legal systems of justice that foster trust, reconciliation, and acknowledgment of victims, alongside enhancing public confidence in institutions and their members, thereby contributing to the strengthening of democracy (Greiff, 2012). Transitional governments are tasked with modifying legal frameworks to attain both retrospective and prospective justice, which involves, on one hand, addressing the repercussions of past injustices and, on the other hand, structuring societal relations to ensure fair treatment of all parties moving forward (Webber, 2012).

According to Kim and Sikkink (2010), a critical component of transitional justice processes is the prosecution of human rights violators from authoritarian pasts, coupled with the establishment of truth commissions. This approach aims to set a precedent for punishing future human rights violations by enhancing preventive mechanisms. The shift in political regimes leads societies in transition to inherit conflict-laden relations from their authoritarian predecessors. In these conflicts, states have occasionally utilized their sovereignty to grant amnesty for past crimes. McEvoy and Mallinder (2012) note that amnesty acknowledges the occurrence of a crime but seeks to eliminate the possibility of criminal prosecution in the interest of mercy and as a compromise between former adversaries, thereby preventing the emergence of new conflicts.

From this viewpoint, the political landscape in Albania, and consequently Albanian society, display a unique stance toward transitional justice mechanisms, consistently exhibiting an absence of accountability and political will among citizens to undertake decisive actions in this regard (Stasa, 2021). Initiatives in this domain appear sporadic and fragmented, lacking the comprehensive approach needed for a thorough “repair” of past relations. Transitional justice strategies often emerge as part of control and obligation frameworks dictated by membership in international organizations, rather than as a result of a genuine internal demand and willingness within the social system. Jusufi *et al.* (2021) highlight that, over 30 years of democracy, the former dictatorial elite has neither been held accountable nor punished, thereby ensuring impunity and promoting them to prominent political and economic positions. This practice of granting amnesty for communist-era crimes in the name of social stability further underscores the challenges in achieving genuine transitional justice in Albania.

In these development conditions, it is of interest to investigate the perspectives of victims of communism regarding the impact of reform, rehabilitation, and transitional processes by democratic governments. To what extent has Albanian society been able to construct a social and ecological environment through transitional justice processes, primarily focused on laws for reparations and compensation for the persecuted? What is the influence of the transition on the lives of the persecuted in Albanian society? What are the reflections of victims of communism in light of the successes and failures of the transition concerning their experiences?

4. Methodology

To address the aim and objective of the research there were used the qualitative data collection approach through semi structured interviews of survivors' experiences from the labor camp in Savër Lushnjë, in Albania.

The research team conducted 27 interviews (21 men and 6 women) designed to explore four main themes related to the survivors' experiences. Less than 20 years of internment were experienced by only 2 of the interviewees, while 10 of the interviewees experienced internment for 20-30 years, and another 10 interviewees experienced internment for 31-40 years. Only 5 of the interviewees experienced internment for more than 40 years. Regarding the age of internment, 12 interviewees were born in the labor camps and experienced internment for less

than 1 year. 11 interviewees were between the ages of 1-10 during their internment, and 4 interviewees were over 10 years old during internment. As for education pursued during internment, only 1 interviewee completed elementary education, while 9 interviewees completed 8-year education, and 17 interviewees completed middle school education. No interviewee pursued higher education during internment. Regarding pursuing of education after leaving the camps, only 5 interviewee's pursued education while 22 did not. Finally, in terms of the completed education level after leaving the camps, 1 interviewee completed elementary education, 9 completed 8-year education, 12 completed middle school education, and 5 completed higher education.

The interview format was revised multiple times by the researchers, reviewed and approved by the Ethic Committee for Research, and adapted into Albanian to ensure cultural appropriateness and understanding for the survivors. Participants were contacted prior to the interviews and informed of the study's purpose, methodology, research questions, and expectations. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via Zoom and lasted on average more than two hours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed into Albanian, and a summary was provided in English. The transcripts were analyzed by coding and categorization, and the data were interpreted in light of the research objectives, using theoretical frameworks or concepts.

Overall, the use of a semi-structured interview format allowed the participants to share their experiences in a comfortable and natural way, resulting in rich and detailed information that provided insight into the experiences of survivors from the labor camp in Savër Lushnjë. The study's methodology and data collection process were designed to ensure the collection of reliable and comprehensive information from survivors.

5. Results

Changes after the fall of the Communist regime.

Following the collapse of the Communist regime, Albania experienced profound transformations, including the establishment of a multi-party democratic system and the enactment of laws dedicated to safeguarding human rights and individual freedoms. These reforms heralded a new era for those who had endured suffering in labor camps under the dictatorship, affording them rights such as freedom of speech and the chance to live in peace.

New life and acquired rights. The newfound freedoms encompass the fundamental human rights previously suppressed by the oppressive regime, including the rights to free speech and to live without fear of retaliation. The stark contrast between life under the dictatorship and the subsequent era, characterized by the acquisition of rights, is vividly reflected in the joy of those who witnessed these changes. This transformation serves as a powerful testament to the value attributed to basic human rights and the opportunity to truthfully recount personal experiences. The ability to speak freely, devoid of fear, emerges as a cornerstone of these newly acquired rights, engendering a profound sense of security and freedom.

These transformations signified not just the chance to reconstruct one's life with newfound freedoms and opportunities but also offered a pathway to reclaim one's dignity and self-worth. Overall, the profound impact of the changes following the collapse of the Communist regime in Albania highlights the intrinsic value of basic human rights and the prospects that emerge when individuals are granted the liberty to begin anew.

What can I say? I was like the Sphinx that had risen from its ashes and come to life. I was given the freedom to start over, and being free, I was happy and started my life anew.

Life had just begun because we had not lived. It is not called life to live without any human rights. A new life was coming, a life of freedom, to at least speak, to have the opportunity to speak freely. To talk about what we saw, to talk about what we heard, and to be able to tell the truth. This was a great joy for us.

Life was more beautiful and better. We lived in a house with my husband's sister, and I also started working in tailoring.

Immigration: Following the collapse of the communist regime, numerous individuals who had endured hardships in labor camps during the dictatorship pursued avenues to enhance their and their families' living conditions. For some, this entailed leaving their homeland to migrate to countries with superior living standards and heightened respect for human rights. These individuals viewed immigration as a chance to initiate anew, distancing themselves from the oppressive conditions of their past.

Choosing to immigrate was not an easy decision, as it often entailed leaving behind loved ones and familiar environments. Yet, the aspiration for an improved life and a more promising future for their families took precedence over the

challenges associated with departing from their home country. For many, the immigration process was arduous and intricate, marked by complex legal procedures and substantial financial expenditures. Despite these hurdles, they regarded immigration as an essential step toward attaining a better standard of living.

The first thing I did was take off my shoes and leave in order to secure a better future for my family and children. As soon as opportunities arose, I went to the Italian embassy in Tirana in 1991. I explained my situation and how I had been in an internment camp for 35 years. To my surprise, they granted me a visa, and it felt surreal until the plane took off.

I was over the moon when I arrived in Italy. I met my father for the first time in my life and lived with him for six years. It was a life-changing experience.

I never had the opportunity to make a change in my life here, but in May 1991, I decided to leave Albania. I left on May 31st and never looked back.

Pursuing the Dream of Education: A significant transformation for many former detainees in the labor camps was the opportunity to finally realize their long-held university studies aspiration. Prior to the fall of the communist regime, educational opportunities were scant and predominantly reserved for those aligned with the party's ideology. Following the regime change, several interviewees seized the opportunity to pursue university studies for themselves or their children, a privilege that had previously been denied to them. This underscores the transformative impact of emigration on the lives of those who departed Albania in quest of a better existence, including the opportunities and experiences they acquired.

I had always dreamed of continuing my education, and after the regime fell, I immediately enrolled in law school. In 1992, I started at the Faculty of Law, and in 1996, I received my degree.

After graduating as a construction technician, we moved to Durrës, where I had the opportunity to work in my field and apply my skills. It was a dream come true for me.

Despite the challenges we faced, my son was able to obtain a degree in Political Science from Columbia University, thanks to the education he received after the fall of the regime.

Challenges in Reorganizing Life Post-Communism:

Housing Considerations. The collapse of the communist regime marked a turning point for former detainees in labor camps, especially concerning housing. The transition period was characterized by a pronounced scarcity of proper housing and essential amenities, presenting substantial hurdles for these individuals. Many had been dispossessed of their homes during the communist era, and others found themselves in substandard living situations, including temporary shelters or overcrowded apartments.

The transition to a democratic government ushered in both new prospects and hurdles. A paramount issue for many former detainees was securing adequate housing. Following the regime's collapse, initiatives were launched to allocate housing to the displaced and homeless; however, these efforts were often protracted and fell short of the need. Some former convict endured lengthy waits to obtain permanent residences or locate appropriate lodging.

This is the first time I own my own house, an apartment. We started from the basics, from cutlery to the most essential things.

Yes, there were difficulties, including finding housing. We were homeless, searching for food, a place to call home, and shelter.

We paid for the house and had it notarized, but Lushnja lost all the documents, and today the apartment appears unregistered. As a result, my sister is still homeless.

Family and Community Support: Building Resilience. Despite facing numerous challenges, former internees exhibited resilience and determination in reconstructing their lives. They adeptly navigated their circumstances with available resources, leaning on family and community support. Many seized the emerging opportunities to enhance their living conditions. Through government programs or by consolidating resources with others, some obtained improved housing. Additionally, the newfound economic freedoms enabled others to acquire essential household items, further stabilizing their post-regime lives. Overall, the collapse of the communist regime instigated substantial alterations in the housing landscape for former labor camp detainees. However, numerous challenges remained that required resolution.

Compensation for Former Persecuted Individuals Remains Elusive. Even years after the collapse of the communist regime, the distribution of rewards to formerly persecuted individuals remains unfulfilled. The issue of compensation for those who endured incarceration in labor camps persists as a significant concern. Many of these individuals were subjected to severe physical and psychological torture,

with the enduring trauma of their experiences continuing to impact them. Despite governmental pledges to offer compensation to the persecuted, a considerable number of these individuals have yet received any form of restitution or support.

During interviews with former internees, narratives frequently emerge of receiving meager payments or, in some cases, no compensation whatsoever from the state. This shortfall in compensation has precipitated considerable financial hardships for these individuals, a significant portion of whom are elderly and no longer able to engage in employment. Consequently, some have become dependent on their families for financial support, whereas others grapple with the challenge of sustaining themselves independently.

We have not received the rewards we deserve, despite the unpaid work we did both in exile and in the political prisons where my father was held. We were not even paid the minimum wage for that labor.

To this day, our funds have been misused. Where are the funds that belong to me and my father?

When it comes to our pension, it is very meager. We receive a minimal amount that is not enough to sustain us.

The absence of adequate compensation has further fostered a sentiment of injustice and frustration among the former internees. They perceive their sufferings and sacrifices as being disregarded or overlooked by the state, which has not fulfilled its commitment to them. Consequently, this breach of promise has resulted in diminished trust in the government and a pervasive sense of disillusionment with the democratic system. Ironically, they view this system as being equally flawed as the communist regime they opposed, underscoring a profound disconnection and discontent with the current political landscape.

Overall, the inability to furnish adequate compensation to the former detainees of labor camps represents a significant concern that demands resolution. This issue transcends financial restitution, touching on the principles of justice and fundamental human rights. It is incumbent upon the government to undertake measures to amend this situation, ensuring that the grievances of these individuals are acknowledged and redressed.

We have not received the rewards we deserve. We did unpaid work both in exile and in the political prisons where my father was held. We did not even receive the minimum compensation for our efforts.

Our funds have been misused to this day. Where are our funds, for me and for my father?

When it comes to our pensions, they have been significantly reduced. We receive a very minimal pension.

Insufficient Political and Official Support. The absence of backing from political spheres and high-ranking state officials significantly obstructed the former detainees of labour camps in their efforts to reintegrate into society post-internment. Numerous individuals recounted their difficulties in securing any form of assistance or support from the government, in spite of enduring years of hardship in the labour camps. They voiced their frustration and disillusionment regarding the authorities' inaction to acknowledge and cater to their needs and concerns.

Several former internees recounted attempts to seek assistance from politicians and officials, only to have their pleas frequently ignored or dismissed. They reported feeling as though their voices went unheard and that they were marginalized by the government. This perceived neglect compounded the difficulties of reintegrating into society and reconstructing their lives post-internment.

Lacking essential support and resources, these individuals encountered substantial barriers in securing employment, finding adequate housing, and accessing fundamental services. Consequently, they were compelled to depend on their own fortitude and resilience to surmount these challenges. The insufficiency of political and official support continues to be a pressing concern for many former detainees, highlighting a critical gap in the post-internment recovery process.

People in power are more interested in their own benefits than in the needs of the people. Albania would be a different place for everyone if those in power paid attention to the needs of the people. Unfortunately, for the last 30 years, political attention has not been focused on the well-being of the people.

We did not receive any support from politicians or high state officials. It was like they were not even aware of our struggles. We do not support any political party.

No, absolutely nothing. No individual has been able to bring the change we need.

Personal effort to succeed and the support of others. The resilience exhibited by the majority of former labor camp internees is noteworthy, as they have successfully rebuilt their lives despite the adversities encountered during their internment.

Personal initiative was a crucial factor in their achievement, reflecting their determination to adapt and reintegrate into society. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that their journey was not solitary. The unwavering support from family, friends, and fellow survivors played an indispensable role in assisting them to surmount the traumas of internment and flourish in their lives after release.

Furthermore, the establishment of structures and programs designed to facilitate their reintegration post-exile was pivotal. These initiatives offered critical support, including access to housing, employment, education, and counseling services. The comprehensive assistance received from these varied sources empowered the former internees to restore a sense of normality and purpose in their lives.

Today, things are different. Even those who were not persecuted have become closer, and we have good relationships.

We have shown that we are not vindictive and have had very good relationships. We have demonstrated how we should behave as kind people, so we had good relationships more or less.

I have become more sociable, and I can say that I value my friends, comrades, opponents, etc.

The repercussions of the experiences endured in labor camps extended beyond physical and psychological ramifications, significantly affecting the social dynamics of the former internees after the regime's collapse. The ordeal of exile imparted crucial lessons on sustaining relationships with family and friends. Numerous former detainees emphasized that the anguish of separation from their loved ones and the looming threat of loss heightened their appreciation and valuation of these bonds.

Moreover, the experience of internment not only left a lasting imprint on the physical and psychological well-being of those affected but also significantly enriched their capacity for empathy and compassion towards others who have endured or are enduring similar hardships. This heightened sense of empathy has propelled some former internees to engage in social activism or volunteerism, dedicating their efforts to assist those in need.

To be honest, everyone has their own experiences and beliefs, but I no longer harbor any kind of hatred.

I cannot say anything, as in most cases, many people followed the law, and that was the law. I have also met people who were witnesses against my father, but I have not spoken ill of them. They were forced to do what they did.

I don't feel anything towards them. Every man who acted, did it for himself.

Nevertheless, the internment experience also exerted adverse effects on their social relations. Several former internees reported challenges in trusting others, particularly individuals in positions of authority, stemming from betrayal experiences under the communist regime. Additionally, some expressed difficulties in relating to people who had not undergone comparable traumas, finding it hard to establish connections with them.

I feel pity for the people who exiled and mistreated us. I'm sure they didn't know the reality of what they were doing.

To have a poisoned soul is worse than having nothing at all, no matter how much of the world you possess.

Message Regarding the Communist Regime. The experiences endured by former detainees in labor camps under the communist regime have significantly impacted their emotional and psychological health. Some report a complete emotional disengagement from those who inflicted suffering upon them during their internment, stating they harbor no resentment or hatred towards their persecutors. For these individuals, the acts of forgiveness and releasing past animosities have been crucial in their journey towards healing and progression.

Conversely, certain former internees continue to nurture negative sentiments towards individuals associated with the regime who subjected them to mistreatment. These individuals may grapple with feelings of anger, bitterness, or a yearning for retribution. For this group, the trauma inflicted upon them remains an acute and unresolved issue, posing significant challenges to moving forward and reconstructing their lives fully.

I told my children, 'Be whatever you want, just don't be a communist'.

We should learn from the past mistakes so as not to repeat them.

That regime should never return. It made us slaves.

Democracy and justice will always prevail.

My constant message is that we should all respect each other, regardless of political beliefs. Let's see each other as Albanians, not enemies. Being optimistic, I believe that this is necessary because we have gone through one of the most brutal dictatorships

in Europe. I hope the moment when Albanians can live in peace with each other is near.

People should be kinder, more tolerant, and love and respect each other. We should be more social and help others whenever we can.

It is crucial to recognize that the experiences of former labor camp internees are distinct and individualized, resulting in a spectrum of emotions and attitudes towards those who perpetrated oppression during the communist regime. The journey towards healing and reconciliation is multifaceted and continuous, shaped by various elements including personal coping strategies, the availability of support networks, and prevailing societal perspectives on historical injustices.

6. Conclusion

The collapse of the Communist regime in Albania precipitated considerable transformations, profoundly affecting the lives of its citizens. The inauguration of a multi-party democratic system, alongside the enactment of legislation aimed at upholding human rights and individual freedoms, endowed individuals with newfound opportunities and rights that had been previously withheld. However, the transition to a democratic governance also introduced fresh challenges, underscoring the significant influence of political and social frameworks on the accessibility of resources and infrastructure.

From a transformative perspective, the collapse of the Communist regime marked a new dawn for individuals who endured suffering in labor camps, affording them the chance to restore their dignity and reconstruct their lives. Immigration emerged as a prevalent choice for those in search of enhanced living conditions and a greater respect for human rights, presenting an opportunity to forge a new existence and break free from the oppressive constraints of their past. Furthermore, the pursuit of education represented another significant opportunity for transformation among some former labor camp internees, who had previously faced restricted educational access. The transformations witnessed in Albanian society following the communist era, along with the endeavors of its survivors during the post-dictatorial phase, illustrate efforts toward community resilience, as conceptualized by Holling (1973) and further elaborated by Faulkner *et al.* (2018). Given that transitional changes often introduce considerable instability into the social environment, resilience has proven to be an essential attribute. This

resilience has played a critical role in enabling survivors to protect and sustain the social-ecological systems inherent in human relationships.

At the individual level, these survivors have faced financial hardships and persistent trauma, impacting their overall well-being. On the community scale, a pervasive sense of injustice and a diminished trust in the government have contributed to a fracturing of faith and a growing disillusionment with the democratic system. Furthermore, the absence of adequate support has erected systemic obstacles to reintegration and recovery, complicating the ability of former internees to access essential services and resources critical for their survival.

The findings of this study reveal that the social foundations for community resilience, as outlined by Folke et al. (2005), amidst crises and the reorganization of the social-ecological environment within the pluralistic Albanian society, seem chaotic and inadequate. Over the span of three decades, pluralistic governments have failed to implement mechanisms that would enhance adaptive governance, foster collaborative systems, cultivate trust, encourage leadership, value social capital, and maintain social memory.

Overall, the ecological approach underscores the interdependence of individuals, societies, and the environment, illuminating how the collapse of the Communist regime in Albania influenced individuals' lives and the nation's collective path. The scarcity of adequate housing and essential needs represents an environmental challenge that impinges on the social and personal well-being of former detainees. This dilemma signifies a shortfall in resources and infrastructure, impairing individuals' capacity to secure fundamental necessities and establish stable, wholesome lives. The absence of compensation for former detainees underscores a shortfall in the political and social systems' capacity to acknowledge and rectify past injustices. This oversight has profound repercussions for the psychological and financial health of those impacted. The deficiency in compensation fosters a pervasive sense of injustice and disenchantment with the political framework, bearing significant implications for the societal cohesion. The findings suggest that Greiff's (2012) strategy for fortifying democracy via transitional justice—aimed at enhancing law-based systems that foster trust, reconciliation, acknowledgment of victims, and civic confidence in institutions and their members—has been stymied by the perpetual state of transition in Albanian society. This continuous flux has hindered the effective implementation of transitional justice measures, thereby impeding progress toward creating a society characterized by justice and fairness.

As Weber (2012) contends, transitional governments are tasked with the dual goal of achieving both retrospective and prospective justice. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that transitional governments in Albania have fallen short of meeting their responsibilities to remedy the repercussions of past misconduct and to manage relations within society effectively.

In conclusion, an ecological approach underscores the intricate interplay among environmental, social, and individual factors in determining the experiences and outcomes of former labor camp internees in Albania. This perspective advocates for a comprehensive strategy that tackles systemic challenges while acknowledging the critical role of social and environmental influences on individual well-being.

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8. *Curriculum Vitae*

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Differences between the coping mechanisms of people who lived in Savër, Lushnja labor camp, between the ones who fled after the '90s and the ones who stayed in Albania

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Sommario

Questa ricerca esamina le risposte degli ex-detenuti nei campi di lavoro a Savër Lushnjë, Albania, esplorando le ragioni delle loro scelte di fuggire o rimanere a Lushnja nel periodo post-regime di Hoxha. Attraverso 27 interviste approfondite, lo studio svela come il trauma personale, le visioni sociali e la resilienza influenzino questa decisione. Rivela una dinamica complessa nella gestione del trauma, resilienza, e nel processo decisionale riguardante l'affrontare o eludere il passato. Questo lavoro illumina la ripresa dal trauma nei regimi totalitari, offrendo spunti sui percorsi di guarigione e reintegrazione sociale.

Parole chiave

Campi di lavoro; meccanismi di coping; trauma; adattamento psicologico; Savër Albania.

Abstract

This research examines responses of ex-detainees in the labor camps in Savër Lushnjë, Albania, exploring the reasons behind their choices to either flee Lushnja or stay there in the post-Hoxha regime. Through 27 in-depth interviews, the study uncovers how personal trauma, societal views, and resilience influence this decision. It reveals a complex dynamic of trauma processing, resilience, and the decision-making process regarding facing or escaping the past. This work sheds light on trauma recovery in totalitarian regimes, offering insights into the paths toward healing and societal reintegration.

Keywords

Labor camps; coping mechanisms; trauma; psychological adaptation; Savër, Albania.

1. Introduction. - 2. Methodology. - 3. Analysis. - 4. Results. - 5. Discussions. - 6. Bibliography. - 7. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction

Albania went through a distinct type of communism for almost 50 years that differed from the rest of Eastern Europe. A combination of isolationism and dictatorship resulted in this small Balkan nation becoming the poorest and most oppressive in all of Europe. Enver Hoxha, the Albanian leader who ruled for four decades, prohibited religion, travel, and private property. Any opposition to his authority was met with harsh retaliation, such as internal banishment, extended incarceration, or even execution. Hoxha held complete control over Albania's political, economic, and social spheres (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Hoxha's journey began immediately after the establishment of the Communist Party in 1941. The party emerged from World War II as the leading provisional government, which in October 1944 made the promise to conduct free elections. By December 1945, the party had two objectives: to consolidate their hold on governmental power and to eliminate all political adversaries who posed a hindrance to the present and future aspirations of communism (Meta & Frashëri, 2019).

After securing the victory of the elections on December 2, 1945 cited in Boriçi (Boriçi, 2021) and establishing the People's Republic of Albania, the communist regime began to deal seriously with the second task. It started with a series of trials that were conducted across the country which were directed, firstly against the Catholic clergy (Agalliu, 2021). However, later on these trials included social democrats, monarchists, landowners who opposed the application of the Agrarian Reform, as well academics and scientists (Autoriteti për Informimin mbi Dokumentet e ish-Sigurimit të Shtetit, 2019). Soon after that, at the dock, there were placed people from different categories, such as: the ones who were part of the National Liberation Movement but clearly expressed dissatisfaction with the policies being applied in Albania. The senior executives of the Communist Party Albania, to support the consolidation of the totalitarian regime, also created the mechanisms by which the persecution, discovery and elimination of political opponents, whether they were real or imaginary, would be exercised.

Over the years, the second task of eliminating the «enemies of the state and of the regime» was the one that occupied most of the time and resources and it led to the perfection of charges not only through direct orders, but through written instructions which had to be followed by the letter (Partia e Punës së Shqipërisë, 1977). They 'invented' ways of re-educating through imprisonment, labor camps, and other forms of discrimination for both the regime offenders as well as their

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relatives close or distant ones. The regime opened new prisons in all major centers, always distinguishing those reserved for political prisoners from the prisons destined for ordinary prisoners. The official purpose of detaining political prisoners was “re-education and rehabilitation” through suffering and labour. While at the beginning this process was mostly done on individual basis and more to induce terror and obedience among the population, in the coming years, all the procedures were established by procedures and bylaws that were approved in the respective institutions.

Establishment of camps and internment areas

Following the decisions taken in December 1944 (Meta & Frashëri, 2019), a series of orders forced a certain category of people: landowners, merchants, former politicians to leave the main cities of Albania as: Tirana, Durrës, Korça, Shkodra etc. and live in other areas of the country. These individuals were denied the right to return to their homes, which were confiscated and used to shelter officials of the new regime, families of martyrs of the National Liberation Movement, etc. As of 1945, internment began to be used as another punitive measure against political opponents, as well as the labor camps were one of the elements that the government used to consolidate their stay in power (Këlliçi, 2020). The earliest information there is about the implementation of this measure is February 1945, when Mehmet Shehu – the prime minister of Albania at the time – ordered to deport those who accommodate refugees in the mountains, or «war criminals», as well as those who refused to hand over the weapons. In the file that contains these orders, are also given the names of the inhabitants of Highlands of Shkodra, Puka and Mirdita who were deported. According to these documents, the internments were not carried out based on a special law. They served as a means of violence and pressure, with the sole purpose of subduing North residents who were not supporters of the Provisional Government of Enver Hoxha (Godole & Bezati, 2021). Another category deported since the beginning of the communist regime in Albania was that of the families of persons who were condemned as «war criminals». The research so far does not provide much data on decisions for their deportation, but testimonies of many of them proves that they have been sent to internment camps as of 1945.

The system of deportations – internments continued to be executed against the regime’s opponents, those who presented escape tendency, or the family members

of political prisoners, and against any person whom the regime suspected of “posing social threats” (Tasi, 2021) This meant that the deportation-internment measure could also be addressed to political prisoners who were finishing their sentence. As of 1979 deportation – internment measure was also applied to children over the age of 14. The deported accused of escaping, or agitation and propaganda, were sentenced, deported from their homes and transferred to internment centers. Although under the law the period of deportation – internment was 3 – 5 years, Deportation – Internment Commissions were entitled to prolong this period indefinitely. The Commission of Deportation – Intermittent has no rivals and no one could revoke its decisions (Boriçi, 2018).

In the archive fund of the Investigation Office, at the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, under the administration of the Authority for Information on former State Security files today, there are hundreds of such decisions that indicate the postponement of internment. In many cases, the duration of internment exceeds 20-30 years. Families of former collaborators with invaders, leaders of Balli Kombëtar and Legaliteti, deported since 1945 remained in internment until the fall of communist regime in 1991 (Kaba, 2020).

There were dozens of sites across Albania identified as political internment centers. The typology of internment camps surrounded by barbed wire, continued until 1954, in which the internee life was very harsh (Meta, 2021). After 1954 there were no more closed areas as concentration camps but were villages from which the internees could not leave without permission. Each day, the internees were required to sign up to a register at the Security Office or the police. The most renewed areas were the villages in the districts of Fier, Lushnja, Vlora and Berat, but indeed all over Albania there were villages used for this purpose. The general criterion continued to be that the residents of the north were internally displaced to the south and viceversa, thereby eliminating contact with the territory of origin and old friendships. The internees mostly worked in agricultural cooperatives, but often engaged in public constructions or reconstructions as was the case with political prisoners.

According to a report of 1954 that is in the official records, the number of internees by Deportation – Internment Commission reached 1103, which geographically were distributed in this way: «662 located in Lushnja district, 206 in Fier district, 71 in Thumana, Kruje, 66 in Borsh, Saranda, 30 in Berat District, 19 in Hajmel, Shkodra, 10 in Cërrik, Elbasan, 12 in Rreshen district, 11 in Zvërnec, Vlora, 3 in Tepelena district, 4 in Lezha district, 5 in Vlora district, 1 in Gramsh, 1 in

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Gjirokastra and 1 in Maliq, Korça» (Koçi, 2020). According to the social categories, internees were divided into: «103 internees as member of war criminals who do not benefit from amnesty. These are located in Lushnja district, and mostly in Gradishtë. 2) 101 internees are chieftains, kulaks or members of their families, who have escaped abroad. 3) 292 internees have members of their families who have escaped abroad, who carry out espionage activity or enter as saboteurs in our country. 4) 239 internees have their family members escaped abroad and reside close to the border line (5 km from the border). 5) 271 internees for risk of escape» The rest are convicted for ordinary causes.

However, according to a report published in 2016 by the Institute for Crime and Consequences of Communism Studies (ISKK) in Albania, the numbers are much higher. During the period 1944 – 1990 the internees were 59,009. According to the same report, the deceased because of the internment conditions were 7022 (2023). In the archives of the Ministry of Interior until 1990 resulted as convicted 25 thousand political prisoners, but since the lack of statistics for prisoners of the period from 1945 to 1946 and sentenced to minor penalties, it believed that in Albania political prisoners were between 30,000 and 34,000. According to a report published in 2016 by the Institute for Studies of Crimes and Consequences of Communism in Albania, political prisoners were 26,768 men and 7,367 women; the political prisoners that died in prison because conditions were inhumane were 984, and 308 others lost their mental ability. According to the same source, 5,577 men and 450 women were sentenced to death and were killed (Instituti i Studimeve per Krimet dhe Pasojat e Komunizmit, 2023). The bodies of prisoners executed or died in prisons due to forced labor or diseases, were not returned to their relatives. According to the annual report of Amnesty International (2017) there is an estimation of 6,000 people who have disappeared during the communist regime, whose whereabouts were never found.

Labor camp in Savër

The eight existing prisons before – World War II were reserved for political prisoners who were designated as «enemies of the people» seven prisons for detainees defined as «ordinal» and three prisons were mixed. During this period, besides the prisons, begun the operation of labor camps for prisoners. Labor camps were places where sentence was served by doing forced labor such as reclamation, public works construction, mining, agriculture etc. They were often built near the

place where prisoners were supposed to work. Such camps were temporary (built with tents or barracks, surrounded by barbed wire and strictly controlled by armed soldiers), while in other cases were located in permanent form, especially near the mines (Sufaj & Sota, 2018).

In the end of November 1953, the infamous Tepelena camp was closed. Those who were freed from exile crossed the barbed wire and made their way home on foot. Thousands of other camp internees boarded Ministry of Internal Affairs trucks and headed for the unknown (Hoxha, 2018). The main center of internment was Savër, a village by the road in Lushnja, where the command was also located. With the closure of the barbed wire camps, the villages of Lushnja and Fier became the main centers of internment.

Following the post-war purge, the Tirana Party Conference of April 1956 would serve as an example to all of those who would dare raise their voice against government officials. Under the hope sparked by the de-Stalinisation process, Tirana's communists hoped to make their leadership more humane, but after that conference where almost 300 different voices were imprisoned or killed, there was no more opposition (Autoriteti për Informimin mbi Dokumentet e ish-Sigurimit të Shtetit, 2020). Actually, the same ways of keeping power were perfected and in the years 1962-1963, there were over 1,200 internees in the district of Lushnja and approximately the same number in the district of Fier. The internees lived in improvised barracks and worked in agriculture. Technically they were not surrounded by the barbed wire fence, but there were other ways of controlling (i.e.: they had to be present while the roll was taken twice a day) them and severe punishments if they did not abide. All of the people staying in the labor camps had their own file on which everything that they did was written and reported (Ministria e Punëve të Brendshme, 1987).

Most of the decisions on deportations and deportations had political reasons, and for this reason, the tendency to escape was the main one, or close kinship had already escaped from Albania and the next ones had to suffer the punishment. There were families which were considered lifelong enemies of the system, that «were constantly trying to undermine the system, and ensure that it failed». Families such as Biçaku, Mirakaj, Pervizi, Kupi, Dosti, Dema, Dine, etc., were repeatedly sentenced and many of them spent more than 40 years in exile. Klora Mirakaj Merlika was 10 years old when she went into exile and a grandmother when she came out (Pandelejmoni, 2018). There were many of them who were born in the labor camps and suffered the same difficult conditions despite not

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being guilty of anything, or ever being under any charge. After all, being the offspring of an «enemy family» was enough for the person to be «enemy of the people» (Këllezi & Guxholli, 2018).

The Savër Camp was founded in 1954 and located near the town of Lushnja, four kilometers away. The camp was divided in two neighborhoods: that of the free people and of the internees. The state propaganda had persuaded the drastic majority of the free men, the internees were the reason the Albanians were in constant war with the imperialist forces and every other country in the world was trying to overthrow the government. It was the propaganda of the communism's messengers and the people believed and adhered to it blindly.

Living conditions in Savër Camp¹

Houses - were built by handmade bricks. Their foundations were parallel to the ground, humidity would reach almost half of the walls' height. Even the floor was laid by this kind of bricks. The walls were firstly plastered and then limed. Two families would live in 24 square meters, which had only one separating wall.

Toilets - None of the buildings had a toilet inside. It was located out of the homes and was for the common use for three to four families. Its area was 1 x 1m and it served for the personal needs of each internee. It was also the place where the internees would wash themselves with water they'd hold in buckets.

Kitchen - did not exist, neither as a designated space nor as a concept. Cooking was usually done in a corner of the barrack or outside of it. The dishes would also be washed outside with the water that was filled and kept in the buckets.

Potable water - Some 3-metre-deep wells were opened in Savër for potable water. They were used by all the camp's internees to fill buckets of water. Worms, leeches, mosquitoes and frogs were rife in that water — it was no different to swamp water. Internees boiled the water before drinking it.

Roads - inside the camp were unpaved. In winter, the mud was knee-deep and, as a resident would put it, 'was sticky like butter'.

Bread - was taken by ration cards.

¹ Information presented in this section is based on primary data collected from interviews with survivors and on observational analysis conducted by the researchers on the extant remnants of housing structures in the area under study.

Roll call - was performed twice or thrice a day and notified by a bell in the center of the camp. Whenever the bell rang, internees had to line up and show their presence, otherwise they'd be punished in different ways.

Police - were ever-present. In the first years, internees needed police clearance to go to the town (Lushnja). An internee couldn't leave the camp without clearance even if they were sick and the town was only four kilometers away. If they were absent in the evening roll call, they would be warned. If they repeated it, they would be taken to the interior branch, where torture or transfer to more distant camps across the Myzeqe Field was.

2. Methodology

The research focused on gathering in-depth accounts of the experiences of survivors from the labor camp in Savër Lushnjë. To achieve this, the research team conducted 27 interviews with survivors using an interview format that was carefully developed by the team. The interview format was revised multiple times by the researchers. After that, it was reviewed and approved by the Ethic Committee for Research in the La Sapienza University, Rome to ensure that it was suitable and ethical for the research participants. The research team took into account all the comments and suggestions received from the Ethic Committee for Research and included them in the final version of the interview format in English. To ensure that the interview format was suitable for Albanian-speaking survivors, the researchers who had excellent knowledge of both English and Albanian adapted the format into Albanian. They then sought the expertise of an Albanian linguistics expert to review the final version of the interview format and ensure that the final version of the interview was culturally appropriate and understandable for the survivors.

The interviews

The interview format was designed to explore four main themes related to the survivors' experiences. The first theme explored the survivors' perception of their life in general and their past experiences. It included questions on the survivors' opinions about their experiences, the characteristics that defined their past, and the

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type of life they dreamt of. This theme aimed to understand the survivors' overall feelings and emotions about their experiences.

The second theme focused on the survivors' own experience, including their emotions, explanations, and feelings. It involved questions on their life in the labor camp, their social relationships, their autonomy and responsibility, and the difficulties they encountered. This theme aimed to gain an understanding of how the survivors' experiences impacted their lives and their emotional and social aspects.

The third theme explored the survivors' life narrative, including the main events that played a role in their life and how they see their past, present, and future. It included questions on their educational and work trajectory, finding a partner, and creating a family. This theme aimed to understand the survivors' life trajectory and the significant events that shaped their lives.

The fourth and final theme focused on the survivors' current identity and their relationship with other spheres of life. It included questions on the most important things in their life at the moment, their self-description, and other significant activities in their lives. This theme aimed to understand how the survivors' experiences in the labor camp impacted their current identity and how they organized their lives post-camp.

The procedure

The study was conducted using a semi-structured interview format that allowed the participants to share their memories, examples, and stories, either their own or those of their friends and acquaintances. This approach allowed for the collection of rich and detailed information that provided insight into the experiences of survivors from the labor camp in Savër Lushnjë.

Prior to the interviews, participants were contacted and explained the study's purpose, methodology, research questions, and what was expected of them. All participants, with the exception of one who was physically unwell, agreed to participate in the study.

The interviews were conducted by clinical psychology students in their final semester of a two-year program, who had received extensive training related to this research. The students were capable of conducting the interviews in an ethical and professional manner. The interviews were recorded on camera and lasted on average more than two hours. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face

in the cities where the participants lived, including Lushnjë, Tirana, Vlora, and Durrës. However, some participants who were permanently residing abroad, specifically in Italy (n=3) and the USA (n=2), also participated via the Zoom platform.

The study's methodology and data collection process were designed to ensure the collection of reliable and comprehensive information from survivors of the labor camp in Savër Lushnjë. Overall, the use of a semi-structured interview format allowed the participants to share their experiences in a way that was comfortable and natural to them, resulting in rich and detailed information that was gathered through narratives.

3. Analysis

Interviews were analyzed through the following steps:

Transcription: The interviews were transcribed verbatim, or word for word, into a written format. As mentioned above all the interviews were recorded, and after that, they were delivered and mp3 format to be accessed in laptop or computer. This allowed for a precise transcription of the interview. Although the mp3 format is voice only with no figure, since the interview was only between the interviewer and the interviewee there were no issues on identifying the speaker. As such, the transcription process went smoothly with no errors.

The interview and consequently the transcription were in Albanian language. For each of the transcribed interview there was a summary in English.

Coding: The transcripts were analyzed to identify key themes, concepts, or patterns that emerge from the data. This process involved identifying and labeling meaningful units of data with codes or categories that captured their content and meaning. This codification process aimed at certain words, phrases or even sentences that described events, feelings, issues, etc.

Categorization: The codes or categories were organized into broader themes or patterns that reflected the topics of interest. The main topics were already there when the interview was conceptualized, so basically there was information related to the life before the labor camp, after the labor camp, the feelings and the sensations related to their life within the camp and outside of it.

Interpretation: The data were interpreted in light of the research question, using theoretical frameworks or concepts to make sense of the findings. Being labelled

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“enemy of the state”, most of the participants in this study had fled immediately after the collapse of Berlin Wall when people in Albania attacked the embassies in Tirana. In fact, being part of these groups, they were used by the regime of that time as a scapegoat to label them as “the destructors of the good name of Albania” (Krasniqi, 2021). The data was analyzed with the groups divided based on one of the major distinctions that the participants displayed: the decision to go back or not to Lushnja. While all interviewees had generally better lives after 1990s, with the collapse of the communist regime, some of them (n=7) had left Savër and never (not even once) returned there again; while the others although had built their lives either in Lushnja or other cities of Albania but kept going back and visiting Savër from time to time. This division was found very intriguing and the main idea was to inquire about the factors that made these people who had lived in the same place for many years, to behave so differently.

Validation: The analysis for these interviews were validated through member checking, where few of the participants were shown the findings and discussed with them making the necessary corrections and amendments.

4. Results

There were 27 interviews that covered many aspects of the lives of the survivors. Below there is a condensed part of the answers that they provided, along with part of the analysis and coding that was applied.

Life before deportation

Same life, difficulties	(20 persons)
Normal life, working regularly	(21 persons)
Well known family	(17 persons)
A family integrated in social and political life	(18 persons)
Family status during regime of Hoxha – normal family	(21 persons)
Middle class family	(22 persons)

The reason of deportation

The others in the family went abroad	(19 persons)
The father has been part of the war	(5 person)

Their reaction when they knew about deportation

Feel not safe	(18 persons)
Get Angry	(22 persons)
Terrified	(19 persons)
Surprised because they were in good positions before	(18 persons)
Everything destroyed in some moments	(23 persons)
The family was separated	(22 persons)

The reaction of their friends, cousins when they knew about deportation

No one stay with them.	(21 persons)
They tried to help them	(13 persons)
They were afraid to speak with them	(20 persons)
They wanted to help them, but were afraid	(23 persons)

The reaction of the community

No one speak.	(21 persons)
They wrote letters to each other	(18 persons)
They had very good relations inside the camp	(19 persons)
The other women helped us	(10 persons)
How they felt when they left their houses.	
Feel sorry.	(22 persons)
Everyone cried	(22 persons)
They were shocked	(19 persons)
They got angry	(17 persons)

Describe life after deportation/the fall of dictatorship

Difficult to integrate	(16 persons)
The family was not well supported	(22 persons)
Stay alone because everyone had his own life	(19 persons)
Feel pessimist	(19 persons)
The government did nothing for us	(23 persons)
Started everything from the beginning	(24 persons)
Find different possibilities to continue the dream	(18 persons)
Didn't feel comfortable	(23 persons)

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Strong relations with our friends	(20 persons)
Full of energy to do the best for our life	(18 persons)

Quotes from the participants related to how they felt

«My father fled Albania, and my mom stayed here. It was my fault..... she was 6 months pregnant with me and couldn't evade with my father» – male 68 years old, 23 years in Savër.

«After 1990 I left Savër, left Albania and never return. I don't want to go back.. ever» – female 77 years old, 29 years in Savër.

«I have nightmares sometimes. Now they are less frequent as compared to before, but I never got used to them» – female 51 years old, born and lived 21 years in Savër.

«Whenever I give an interview, I prepare myself to be strong to back to those days, to those memories» – male 65 years old, 34 years in Savër.

5. Discussions

The study of survivors from the labor camps in Saver Lushnjë, Albania, reveals deep-seated divisions rooted in whether participants remained within the country or sought new lives abroad post-regime. This emblematic division of the broader societal aftermath of the Hoxha regime's downfall, is result of multifaceted factors including family background, individual trauma experiences, relationships with the past, and the contrasting opportunities and challenges encountered by the survivors. These elements collectively shape the nuanced tapestry of survivor responses and coping mechanisms.

Let's refine and expand the discussion with a more coherent structure and detailed logic:

Introduction to Survivor Experiences

The study of survivors from the labor camps in Saver Lushnjë, Albania, reveals deep-seated divisions rooted in whether participants remained within the country or sought new lives abroad post-regime. This bifurcation, emblematic of the broader societal aftermath of the Hoxha regime's downfall, is informed by multifaceted factors including family background, individual trauma experiences,

relationships with the past, and the contrasting opportunities and challenges encountered by the survivors. These elements collectively shape the nuanced tapestry of survivor responses and coping mechanisms.

Family Background and Its Long-Shadow

Central to understanding the survivors' divergent paths is the role of family background. The legacy of being branded as enemies by the regime created a primary criterion for discrimination, further nuanced by the degree of perceived 'betrayal' based on familial actions post-WWII. Those with relatives who fled Albania were permanently marked as traitors, a stigma that persisted through generations, relegating their families to the margins of society and making them prime targets for labor camp internment. This historical burden heavily influenced the decision-making process for survivors' post-regime, dividing them between those seeking reconnection with their diasporic family members abroad and those who stayed, navigating a landscape of limited resources and social ostracization.

The universal experience of trauma within the camps opposes the individualized nature of its impact and the coping strategies developed in its wake. For those who fled, the severity of their trauma often manifested in denial and a stark severance from their past, viewing their departure as a definitive break from the sources of their pain. This group's narrative is marked by a persistent struggle with unresolved trauma, evidenced by recurring nightmares and a desire to erase painful memories entirely. Conversely, survivors who remained in Albania often adopted a more confrontational approach to their past, engaging with their memories and even their persecutors in a manner that facilitated a form of communal healing and reconciliation. This ability to directly engage with their trauma and its sociopolitical underpinnings underscores a distinct resilience and a capacity to find solace and strength within their local communities.

The relationship with the past emerges as a pivotal divergence point between the two groups. For emigrants, physical and psychological distance from the locus of their suffering impedes the processing and integration of their experiences, leaving them in a limbo of unresolved trauma. In contrast, those who remained in Albania exhibit a dynamic engagement with their history, participating in public commemorations and dialogues that not only serve as acts of collective memory and catharsis but also as foundational elements in the reconstruction of their identities and communities' post-trauma.

Differences between the coping mechanisms

While emigration offered political and economic freedoms, it also introduced challenges of assimilation and identity, with survivors navigating complex landscapes of memory, loss, and adaptation. The decision to leave or stay is thus emblematic of broader survival strategies, reflecting a deep interplay between personal trauma narratives, family legacies, and the socio-political fabric of post-communist Albania. Survivors' efforts to rebuild, whether through political activism, community leadership, or simply the pursuit of «normal» life, illustrate the varied paths of resilience and recovery in the aftermath of systemic oppression.

This examination of the labor camp survivors' experiences underscores the profound impact of historical trauma on individual lives and community structures. It highlights the essential role of memory, both personal and collective, in navigating the aftermath of repression and in forging pathways to healing and reconciliation. By articulating the varied responses to trauma and the mechanisms of coping and adaptation, the study offers critical insights into the interplay between history, trauma, and resilience, providing valuable lessons for understanding and addressing the long-term effects of totalitarian regimes.

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Social relations and internment camps: A socio-psychological analysis on a sample of interviews with former residents from Lushnjë (Albania)

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Riassunto

L'articolo indaga i fattori psicosociali dell'internamento nei campi di Lushnjë durante il periodo comunista albanese, soffermandosi su alcuni aspetti specifici delle relazioni di gruppo in situazioni estreme: le dinamiche di categorizzazione, stratificazione e differenziazione in termini di relazioni tra ingroup e outgroup e la formazione di relazioni coesive interne necessarie alla sopravvivenza. Analizzando le interviste condotte con gli internati selezionati dal progetto Face-Up, si analizza come, anche in contesti di violenza e disumanizzazione, si possano attivare relazioni autentiche e positive con persone sia dell'ingroup che dell'outgroup. Infine, si esamina l'ipotesi che tali relazioni possano contribuire alla resilienza.

Parole chiave

Contesti estremi; deumanizzazione; relazioni sociali.

Abstract

The article investigates the psychosocial factors of internment in the Lushnjë camps during the Albanian communist period, focusing on some specific aspects of group relations in extreme situations: the dynamics of categorization, stratification and differentiation in terms of ingroup and outgroup relationships, and the formation of internal cohesive relationships necessary for survival. Analysing interviews conducted with inmates sampled by the Face-Up project, it is explored how, even in contexts of violence and dehumanisation, positive authentic relationships can be activated with people from both ingroup and outgroup. Finally, the hypothesis that such relationships can contribute to resilience is examined.

Keywords

Extreme Contexts; Dehumanisation; Social Relations.

1. Introduction. - 2. Method. - 3. The processes of enmification: the enemies of people making. - 4. The processes of solidarity among the internees. - 5. Internal and external relationships. - 6. The role of education and other socialisation agencies. - 7. Conclusions. - 8. References. - 9. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction

The literature on (inter-)group relationships in extreme situations highlights how the ability to create social bonds in extreme settings is a factor that can increase the chances of survival (Davidson 1980; Bělin *et al.* 2022). Studies have shown that “only in rare instances was survival a purely individual achievement. In most cases survival was due to the operation of social factors” (Abel, 1951, p. 155). The literature on environmental disasters also suggests that rather than panic and disorientation reactions, most people respond to crises by making the greatest possible decisions to protect people and property, despite limited resources in terms of time, money, structures, and protective equipment (Lindell, 2012).

An increase in reciprocal relations has been observed under particularly difficult life-threatening conditions, as in the case of Nazi internment camps:

the phenomenon of spontaneously arising reciprocal human relations among the inmates of the Nazi concentration camps. [...] Interpersonal bonding, reciprocity, and sharing were an essential source of strength for ‘adaptation’ and survival in many of the victims. (Davidson 1980, p. 2).

Following the initial trauma caused by entry into the camp system, a social structure was quickly reconstituted among the internees through the formation of groups and bonds of trust:

through innumerable small acts of humanness, most of them covert but everywhere in evidence, survivors were able to maintain societal structures workable enough to keep themselves alive and morally sane. (Des Pres, 1980, p. 142).

Under extreme conditions, then, mutual assistance is seen as a form of resistance to maintain one’s inner freedom (Messina, 2017, p. 140); In other words, it is a system to keep one’s identity intact despite living conditions being influenced by the total institution in which they reside (Scott, 2011; Wallace, 2017).

Although solidarity and mutual aid often manifested themselves in small gestures sometimes even of a purely symbolic nature, these seem to have had a significant impact on the ability to adapt to the socially and physically extreme living conditions typical of concentration and internment camps; according to Klein (1972), this is a specific psychosocial response termed “cohesive pairing behavior” that sees survival intimately linked to community.

Bettelheim (1943, p. 417) considers prisoners in Nazi concentration camps as persons finding themselves in an “extreme” situation: the prisoners were deliberately tortured, suffered from malnutrition, had to perform heavy labour, were controlled in every aspect of their lives, and were not entitled to adequate medical care (Hodgkins and Douglas 1984). These same peculiarities characterized the lives of inmates in the internment camps of communist Albania; however, unlike Nazi concentration camps, Albanian internment camps are distinguished by their unprecedented duration of more than forty years. This contributed to creating specific long-term in-group and out-group dynamics.

This article focuses on the lives of internees within these camps, in particular the Lushnjë camp. Using hermeneutic analysis of interviews conducted with survivors in the Lushnjë camp, the paper aims to investigate the psycho-social factors of internment through the dynamics of categorization, stratification and differentiation in terms of in-group and out-group relationships, and the formation of internal cohesive relationships necessary for survival.

The dictatorship of the communist regime of Enver Hoxha between 1944 and 1985 (the year of his death) was characterised by harsh forms of repression of dissent through thousands of killings, imprisonments, and deportations to internment camps even for those who were simply suspected of holding different opinions. After Hoxha’s death and the protests that broke out in the country from 1989 onwards, the first democratic elections in 1991 marked the end of the communist regime as well as of Albania’s isolation from the international community.

Thirty years after the end of one of the most dramatic periods in Albanian history, the process of elaborating on the suffering endured is still in its infancy. In this process, which is undoubtedly laboured by the memory of the horrors of the dictatorship period, an essential part is represented by the testimonies of those who experienced the suffering firsthand, particularly in the internment camps.

These testimonies shed light on modes of resilience based on group cohesion and solidarity between those who faced the same situations of dehumanisation, deprivation, and exclusion. These are processes and dynamics that have in many cases allowed not only survival, but also the creation of strong social bonds that have remained clear in memory.

2. Method

This study is based on the analysis of interviews conducted as part of the EC “Face-up” project “Faces from the past: the fight for freedom and democracy during the regime of Hoxha” (Programme: Europe for Citizens, Ref. N. 609250-CITIZ-1-2019-1-AL-CITIZ-REMEM - Duration 18 months 1.1.2021-30.6.2022). The interviews were with survivors of Albanian internment camps during the communist regime.

Twenty-seven in-depth interviews were conducted involving 21 men and 6 women ranging in age from 51 to 83. All interviewees had experienced the Lushnjë camp although some of them had also lived for shorter or longer periods in other internment camps in the country.

The interview administration was predominantly face-to-face (in different cities in Albania: Lushnjë, Durres, Tirana, Vlora), except in a few cases when some online interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform (some participants no longer live in Albania but reside in Italy, the U.S. and Canada). The interviews were conducted in Albanian by expert researchers of the University of Tirana in collaboration with the NGO Zen Qytetar of Lushnje. The interviews were semi-structured, being conducted with the help of an outline divided into three sections: before, during, and after internment. The procedure and the interview outline have been approved by the Ethical Committee of the Department of Psychology of Development and Socialization Processes, Sapienza University of Rome (Protocol n. 241 17/02/2022).

As a preliminary activity, the University of Tirana provided extended abstracts of the interviews in English. Subsequently, three students at Sapienza University of Rome, coordinated by an Albanian mother tongue, first dealt with the translation of the interviews into English and then with an initial coding. At the end, a senior researcher made the review of the first coding and the thematic analysis.

The analysis of the interviews followed the hermeneutic approach, and for this reason ample space was left for the direct testimony of the interviewees, who may sometimes make use of dialectal expressions and idioms. In particular, thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns and themes. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data, organizing and describing the dataset in detail and interpreting various aspects of the research topic. Following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006), before starting coding each research team member became familiar with the data by independently reading through all the interview transcripts. the

research team then immersed itself in the data through repeated and active reading, looking for common cores of meaning. In phase 2, transcripts were analyzed inductively to identify descriptions of participants' perspectives and experiences across all data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Initial codes were generated to identify interesting features of the data, focusing on three specific elements of the interview analysis: the dynamics of categorization, stratification, and differentiation in terms of in-group and out-group relationships; the role of education and other socialization agencies; and the activation of attachment to place. In phase 3, the different subthemes for each topic were identified. In phase 4, a review of the themes was carried out, eliminating the invalid or overlapping ones and refining the remaining ones. In phase 5, themes were named, labeled as: enmification processes, solidarity between internees, internal and external relations and the role of educational and socialization agencies. The results are summarized in the Table below. Finally, in phase 6, a report was written and reworked for this purpose.

Tab. 1 – The thematic analysis results

Theme	Description
Enmification processes	Is a typical process of total institutions and extreme contexts that aims at the identification of a common enemy, a scapegoat towards whom to focus discontent, through its systematic dehumanisation.
Solidarity between internees	It describes the process of creating a very cohesive ingroup among the internees and the strong opposition to the outgroup caused by the isolation from the rest of society and the persecution to which they were subjected.
Internal and external relations	It deals with the dynamics of creating personal bonds of internees both inside and outside the camp, the benefits of establishing such bonds but also their limitations and difficulties.
The role of educational and socialization agencies	Focuses on the role of socialising agencies such as school and family in the daily lives of internees with particular attention to ingroup and outgroup relations.

3. The processes of enmification: the enemies of people making

Internment camps were used by the Albanian communist dictatorship to conduct a violent campaign of control and repression of dissent. In the camps lived individuals who were deemed by the regime to be “enemies of the people” who were given “class differentiation” treatment aimed at self-mortification.

In The SAGE Encyclopedia of War, Liora Sion (2018) defines enmification as the process through which people dehumanize their adversaries and identifies types of explanations for this phenomenon. First of all, there is a natural explanation, according to which the construction of the enemy is functional to evolution of the species and survival, especially in contexts of conflict (Grossman, 1995). Then there is a psychological explanation, according to which the construction of the enemy is functional to translate people’s fears and hostilities, making them targets (Volkan 1985, 1988). Finally, according to the political explanation, enemy image creation is used by governments to mobilize the nation around common goals (Murray and Meyers, 1999). It is a method of social control employed to propagate and maintain the values of the dominant system (Keen, 1986; Spillman & Spillman, 1991) by reinforcing the opposition of us versus them (Sion, 2018).

Many of those interviewed described their enmification by remarking how internees were identified and categorized by the rest of society as “enemies of the people”, “tsarists”, and “kulaks”. The process of enmification affected without distinction anyone who represented a potential threat to the regime, and even children suffered this form of persecution through the degradation of the person, in fact, frequent exposure to enmification language has serious effects on emotional, behavioural and normative levels (Bilewicz and Soral, 2020). This is well illustrated by the words of one of the interviewees:

From childhood, we were fought by their children, they called us tsarists, enemies, everything. In the elementary school we attended in Savër until the age of eight, we never received a New Year gift. While other children were given a New Year’s package (interview 8_M70).

The internees were systematically discriminated from an early age and the use of negative epithets in the common language to identify them contributed to the creation of the enemy image:

It is true that I was a child, but regarding persecution from an early age, we experienced that class differentiation. (...). Kulak, enemy, it was those epithets in the common language that people knew so much, and, in that sense, it was, sometimes in a low voice, sometimes without a voice, sometimes in a high tone (interview 2_M60).

Family biography often determined the status of enemy of the people. So, if, for example, a family member had been imprisoned or was a fugitive, the entire family group could be interned and sent as far away from their home as possible. It is a system to isolate the internees from the rest of society, not only physically but also morally:

We were completely separated, our people were separated from us, they no longer even came for funerals, which was the most serious thing, nor for weddings, nor for engagements. I mean, there was a disconnect, a total break. Even those who came, who had closer relations with us, they came secretly (interview 7_M70).

Those who stayed in contact with internees were under suspicion and were themselves at risk of being interned, and sometimes the rest of the non-interned family was persecuted and discriminated against:

Yes, the uncles there and the whole tribe did not send their children to school, did not give them work, just hard work there in the cooperative. Deprived of every right, watched every step they took, at funerals, at weddings, everywhere they went they were watched. And where you go, we have separate rooms. (...) So, they were exiled even more than us here. That here the blow was distributed to many families, there it was concentrated in one family, and when you concentrate on one family the blow was greater, the pressure was greater (Interview 3_M65).

The consequences of remaining in contact with internees were well known; in fact, it was the internees themselves who decided to avoid relationships with non-interned friends and relatives:

Our fathers were three brothers. Families were interned, all three families were interned. So, other people, other cousins, we don't blame them. They didn't come because if they came to us there would be consequences (interview 18_M77).

As we learn from the testimonies, this separation was necessary to protect loved ones but still had extremely detrimental effects on the internees' social networks:

My parents, for example, knew that they would harm non-exiled people if they contacted them. And that's why even my mother, I remember her often, said she had no one. (...) This was a necessary separation for the sake of those we loved (interview 13_F70).

However, respondents do not blame the family or community that abandoned them because they are aware of the situation they are in:

We absolutely never judged our people by the circumstances under which they happened because we understood very well that it is better to create, so to speak, a kind of communication vacuum than to cause even greater harm to one's family members (interview 26_M65).

The identification of the enemy and its physical and moral isolation was the first process for the creation of a contrast between two groups: the enemies of the people and the rest of free society. Enmification, therefore, set the stage for the realization of other practices of dehumanization. Internment life was characterized by total exclusion from the rest of society and deprivation of many rights; they were forced to do the hardest work, mainly in agriculture and swamp reclamation, and received lower wages than the rest of the population.

In addition, internees were monitored in every aspect of their lives, and to prevent them from straying they had to report for roll call several times a day:

I remember my father having to go to roll call three times a day in the morning when there were health problems, while other days he went in the morning and in the evening (interview 14_M71).

They were forced to live in overcrowded situations in poor hygienic conditions and were malnourished. Moreover, the mechanism of social isolation of the single person and of her/his familiar group in case of reciprocal contact replicates the same dynamic typically adopted in case of infective diseases and health pandemics.

4. *The processes of solidarity among the internees*

The isolation from the rest of the society and the persecution to which the internees were subjected thus set the stage for the creation of a very cohesive ingroup and for a strong contraposition with the outgroup. Very illustrative of this opposition is the episode recounted by one interviewee:

Savër was a camp divided in two. That is, there was a neighborhood built on barracks and a neighborhood built on stone houses. So, it was a large group of people who together constituted a unity in evil and, so to speak, being together with a large amount of people created a kind of common armor of this whole group, (...) they created a certain unity of disagreement with evil. [...)] We also created an imaginary war; we declared war on those children in the other neighborhood. [...] I mean, we simulated a real war, we prepared swords, we made shields, we carved those wooden swords, we made slingshots, we created those group organizations, we even opened up a real war to them [...], I mean, even in those circumstances of the childhood reality, the reality of adolescence, we somehow, being a community that remained firm and in the beginning, with this community we created the idea of the group and the idea of war, and the idea of opposition. We wanted to oppose something, even the idea of opposition within us was a real idea (interview 26_M65).

The creation of a cohesive group among the internees was a process marked by a few stages, the first of which were geared toward the immediate satisfaction of some basic needs among which that of food and shelter from the cold were certainly among the priorities. In fact, the provision of sufficient food for the interned families was the main daily activity even in view of the presence in the camp of entire households with young children. As for shelter from the cold, it must be remembered that the internees occupied barracks and not brick rooms exposed, therefore, to the rigors of winter and the oppressive heat of the summer period. But in addition to such basic needs, isolation was a further factor of dehumanization that made the condition of internees particularly distressing.

One interviewee tells how he was always shunned by the rest of the “free” population and had friends only among the ingroup of internees:

I had friends who were persecuted, absolutely no one else approached me, not even on the street or in the café no one. We would go here and there, like an animal, coming from work to home, leaving home to go to work. I had no contact at all (Interview 10_M83).

This condition of deprivation and isolation compared to those in the same city who were not interned, the “free” people as they were often called, fostered the emergence of solidarity behaviours among those who were experiencing the same process of dehumanization. These behaviours did not concern only the aspect of mutual aid in times of need, such as those precisely related to basic needs related to survival, but something more, a kind of bond that united those who were in the same condition of deprivation. Beyond, therefore, the differences of geographic origin, but also cultural, social, and religious differences, the process of social cohesion ensured that those who found themselves in the condition of internees were able to overcome very hard trials that they would otherwise not have been able to face as individuals.

From the stories of internees, however, a strong feeling of solidarity, reciprocity, and friendship in the ingroup shines through:

With people of my generation, let's put it this way, who were suffering as I was, we had such a compactness, such a solidarity that only those conditions impose, that you are under surveillance, under terror, under fear, under physical exhaustion, etc. We did very well, it happened to everyone who needed us, me for them and them for me, always helping each other. And we were compact (interview 9_M80).

The perception of belonging to the same group facilitated the creation of friendly relationships, sharing of moments such as school as well as free time:

We had friends, we had company, we played soccer, we went to school together, we consulted on everything. The friendship was incorruptible (interview 3_M65).

Despite the critical conditions, internees describe a peaceful and fraternal coexistence with other families that helped them overcome difficulties:

When we arrived, we lived in one room. In the room the corridor was 1 to 1, the bathroom, it was shared, there was a family from Devolli and we were there. We lived perfectly for seven years, today it is difficult to find a fraternal family, we did not experience even the smallest incident with each other. [...] God had united people's hearts and they overcame all evil, spiritually, and physiologically, to live as Brothers with each other. That pain and suffering brought people together, made them united to face evil. [...] when the oldest daughter of that family in Kapshtica got

married, we did the united marriage, as one family. So, we had the same concerns, we had the same experiences (interview 3_M65).

While befriending relationships were crucial for internees to break deprivation and isolation, in actual fact many interviewees described such relationships much more profoundly by comparing such bonding to family bonding as one ex-internee describes well:

Humanity and love existed in us, and we were lucky to always live with very good families (interview 4_F74).

These are thus deeper bonds than those typical of friendship that go even beyond the mutual help, material or moral, that people in the same condition of difficulty can establish:

The people who were exiled like us were wonderful people. They were people who loved us, and we loved them, they helped us and we helped them, we cried like a real family. Good and bad, we went through everything. Maybe that also helped us, kept us alive. That love, respect (interview 13_F70).

This sense of belonging to the same family is a common feature of all respondents who seem to refer in some way to some form of cohesive social identity process within the group.

The most positive moment was the familiarity with each other. We had established a kind of friendship [...]. And if you, a family, had a misfortune or a joy, we would all get together and help that family. I mean, she was the most positive thing there was (interview 27_M65).

Thus, it is not about friendship generically understood, but about deep bonds between people who share the same condition of marginalization and suffering. Such bonds concern the most intimate aspects of people's lives, those aspects that are revealed only to those who can understand the reasons for suffering but also those for joy. As the words of one of the interviewees well explain:

Man will rejoice, laugh, cry, in whatever environment he lives (interview 20_M78).

They try, therefore, to live a normal life in which they play together, engage in recreational activities, and create bonds:

I always gathered my friends and did theater because I had a great desire to become a theater actress. [...] The times when we girls and boys got together and did theater and had fun, there were hours when we forgot everything (interview 4_F74).

The testimony of another interviewee confirms that the various activities that took place in their free time were a way of finding their own dimension and alleviating the suffering they experienced daily:

We were active people and tried to build our social life in our own way. We had created a football camp, we played football for our own amusement. Often boys from the camp tried to join the Lushnjë team, but they were not accepted because they were exiled. There were many boys who were talented and knew how to play. [...] In the free time we had, we either played chess, or backgammon, or played cards [...]; we discussed sports, we discussed books, there were some clubs, for example in '79/'80 my father gave an Italian course to a good number of boys there. [...] learning a foreign language became a goal (for the internees), we spread it. [...] But so, individually, or socially, groups were created for everything (interview 26_M65).

5. Internal and external relationships

Obviously, the bonds that were established were constrained by the stratification of society, which did not allow personal relationships to be built between different classes. As one of the interviewees recounts, one hardly ever married for love in such a context:

At that time, few marriages were made out of love, but at that time there was fairness, there was a decision. So, out of necessity, I did not fall in love knowing myself, but knowing my family and my wife's family in a friendly way (interview 7_M70).

Another interviewee recounts how his first love was interrupted before it even began because of his different social background:

I can tell it as the story of my life, that my first love in life was impossible and ended up being impossible. Because the girl was on the other side. We loved each other but from afar and one day [...] an agent came to me. I was below the bridge, he was above, and his shadow fell on me in the water where I was fishing. He froze my blood because he said he had come to deport me, to put me in prison. [...] He threatened me: "What about love?" I said nothing, pretending I knew nothing. "Nobody?" he said, Nobody. "For your sake I say this, stay in your rank that (if you insist) with her I will be the one to put you behind bars and you will get ten years in prison". All hope was cut short there and I had to find it in my rank [...] until I found it in Laç, someone who was the same as me (interview 14_M71).

One of the interviewees narrates an episode concerning a relationship between a free girl and an inmate:

It happened here in our sector. He was an intern, he lived in Gradishte, but with a job here, and he fell in love with a girl here, he had a communist father, he took her home, the organisations understood and took her away from home. It was not conceived [...]. Others did not dare to love, that there were consequences. We tried to find when we belonged in the range, in our people, among ourselves. It was a problem to marry and a problem not to marry. "Why is this one not getting married, what's wrong? Is he going to run away?" And the security spies would think that, provoke conversation, and put him in jail. Or "that you want to get married. Eh, why did he get married? Where did he get it? How, when, where?" (interview 3_M65).

In this last interview excerpt, it emerges how marriage could be used as an instrument to control the internees. This is confirmed by another interview:

I got married, I got married young because my mother told me to marry you young so that they would not suspect you of running away. Because if you were married, they did not think you could run away and leave your family, even the children (interview 27_M65).

As it has been reconstructed, the life of the internees was controlled in every aspect, even for health problems it was necessary to have specific authorization to leave the camp and visit the doctor: this was granted only in rare cases and it was sometimes denied even in serious situations. In this regard, the testimony of an interviewee is valuable:

Even if you were sick, you had to ask the brigadier for permission, you had to go to work when you were sick because it was a necessity of life. Even if they gave you permission to go, they didn't report that it was necessary to stay for 2-3 days off, they didn't give it to you because you were the enemy [...]. My younger brother fell ill, 17 years old, and the local doctor left him at home and did not take him to hospital, a week here, after a week when he got worse, the infection became serious, then he was forced to take him to hospital, he was operated on, he went on Monday, on Tuesday he was operated on, on Wednesday he was operated on for acute meningitis and in the second operation when the surgeon came out of the operating room, and the question asked by his colleague: "how did he go?" "One less enemy". My brother has been dead for many years, and I have forgotten him, but I have never forgotten this word, this expression of the doctor who took the Hippocratic oath. "One less enemy" (interview 3_M65).

The episodes outlined so far effectively describe the dynamics of relations between ingroup and outgroup that the internees experienced daily. There is no doubt that the discrimination and persecution suffered by the internees was systematic, but there is no lack of evidence of how free individuals attempted, albeit with small gestures, to reject the class differentiation imposed by the dictatorship. For example, one interviewee reports the reaction of a doctor visiting the camp at the sight of the poor hygienic conditions of the food intended for the internees:

I was four years old in Tepelena and I understood little about it, but I remember a scene. One day a doctor came from Gjirokastra, the doctors called him Lluka, he was a very good doctor. He came to that big courtyard where food was being made and found that big cauldron of bulgur (couscous-like) and worms, he saw it and called the officer and the cook and was told: "Either keep these people as people, or shoot them", even with courage he kicked that cauldron and spilled the red vermiform mess (interview 4_F74).

Other interviewees tell of one specific figure, Zoga Veliu, a nurse who was highly respected and well-liked in the Savër camp for the help she provided to the internees:

We had a nurse, for whom I feel respect, for that light because she no longer lives. There was a Zoga Veliu [...]. The lady who was a nurse in Savër did not differentiate between us persecuted people who were called enemies of the people. At any time of night or day when we, the persecuted, knocked, she was ready. She helped us with all her strength and ways, with the little knowledge she had as a nurse (interview 13_F70).

Her sister was a nurse there in Savër, and I can say that her name as a woman was Zoga Veliu, she was an extremely dedicated woman, and I can say that her mission as a nurse was a high-level humanitarian mission and she never used the fact that she was a privileged family and a communist family as a means to conduct class warfare [...]. So, even in the worst of times, even in those realities that were not very positive, there were absolutely positive people as well as there were negative people (interview 26_M65).

In reality, the bloc division between internees and free people was not so clear-cut. In fact, the behaviour of those who even held public office or belonged to the category of free people and were members of the Communist Party testifies to the fact that they often disagreed with the treatment of internees and their families. Of course, these were more or less explicit behaviours that in any case attested to the existence of certain differences within the non-interned category.

According to some interviewees, most of the communists in Savër did not approve of the party's treatment of the internees and some even tried to help them without being discovered:

If Savër had 57 communists, for me and many others, 40 were wonderful people. He was a communist, but he absolutely did not like the way they treated us. Then there were these 15 who, if they looked at us on the spit, thought it was little. [...] There were residents who also helped from the neighbourhood of the free, always trying not to be noticed. There were many good people among the free. And those who were in power, who were good like Qani Ganiu, the Cerepi family, in total, a responsible sector Enver Lici, Pal Prifti. There were people who showed you with their eyes that they did not hate you, that they felt sorry for you. But the task had to be done. When you looked at something and there was no one around, you saw

nothing. The greatest help you give a person is the moral support that they could not take away physically. Moral support was provided by many really good-hearted people and they saw this as a tragedy (interview 14_M71).

In fact, the judgment of internees seems to be able to discern differences from “free people”. Respondents show that they understand that there are often no feelings of hostility toward them and that one should not judge those who are not in their deprived conditions as to a single block. In short, these are very diverse positions of free people who secretly show understanding toward internees. The problem, as one interviewee testifies, is the system of which free people are part who are instead perceived, in a general way, as good people:

The free people... I said that Savër was divided into two factions, so to speak. The main street was the barracks of the internees, ballists or reactionaries as they were called, with all kinds of epithets, and of the freedmen, those who were people who came to supervise or guide us who were interned. Apart from a few leaders, the ordinary people, for me, were good people, they did not hate us. They did not hate us; I mean a free man could not enter us either for death or for marriage. If he came in it was a gamble for them, because to help the enemy of the class, is to go against the party. And others, others. For us ordinary people they were good people, I cannot say they were bad people. They secretly loved us. [...] But it's not the people who didn't love us. People loved us and we loved them. It was the regime; it was the system, and I cannot blame the people (interview 13_F70).

The opposition between in-group and out-group seems to be mitigated by the identification of the outgroup in an inner circle of people represented mainly by those in power or those who wanted to get ahead. In fact, not only do the internees believe there were good people among the military and the inhabitants of Lushnjë who did their best to help them, but in some cases a feeling of closeness and understanding is perceived even with those who were not interned. After all, the whole of Albania lived in poverty:

Our history as Albanians is in itself a drama, because there were two types of persecution: the economic one that all Albanian families experienced and the one we experienced as a layer of former persecuted people, the other aspect of class differentiation as it was called (interview 2_M60).

Responsibility for the internees' suffering should not be attributed to the freedmen, who indeed demonstrated sympathetic behaviour in a context of general poverty that affected all Albanians. Instead, responsibility is attributed to that system well represented by barbed wire, as recalled by one of the interviewees:

In Tepelena we found ourselves in a field surrounded by barbed wire, and at a young age like we were, small children, you think that's how the world is, surrounded by barbed wire. There was no difference at school. Even those villagers who were naked like us. We were in the camp and those outside the camp were just as poor. But there the bazaar was held on weekdays and we, to go to school, had to pass through that bazaar and the villagers would give us a piece of bread, some curd. The little they had. They knew we were the children of the camp, and they gave us all the opportunities they had (Interview 18_M77).

6. The role of education and other socialisation agencies

Some institutions played a key role in the daily lives of internees, both at the level of in-group and out-group relations.

The school attendance of interned children represented one of the rare opportunities for contact with the rest of free society. However, as with many other aspects of the internees' lives, schooling was also controlled by the regime as they were not allowed to continue their studies after high school:

Until high school, we had free choices in terms of schooling, (...) there were many young people my age who had different tendencies that they could not develop, girls and boys who finished high school with excellent results but stayed in the field or worked in agriculture. We had no rights, dreams were blocked (interview 4_F74).

The internees were excluded from certain common moments of school life and were not granted any recognition of excellence as they could not be graded with top marks. The school was, therefore, an ambivalent institution for the internees; while on the one hand it was a place where they suffered discrimination, on the other hand it restored a semblance of normality to the camp children's lives. Moreover, the interviews testify that the teaching staff proved to be a sensitive

group to the discrimination faced by students who came from the internment camps:

There were also the teachers, for me the level of the teachers was different from the rest of the population. The teachers were a kinder bunch, they felt sorry for us being treated that way. [...] The good students were appreciated by the teachers. Only the teachers were different from the rest of the state institutions at that time. [...] The most difficult thing is to tell the child that you are a tsarist, you don't receive parcels, everyone received parcels for the new year. Or the teacher would tell me, "O star, I can't give you a roll of honour because they won't let me give it" (interview 8_M70).

Even in the case of the educational institution, the system of segregation instituted by the dictatorship did not allow for the recognition of talents in students from the camps, but nonetheless, the majority of teachers were aware of the injustice perpetrated and regretted it, as stated by interviewees:

Most of the time all the teachers were very human, hurt regardless of the fact that they did not give us an A because they were ordered to, otherwise if they did, they would give the school the right. In a way, you saw 90 per cent of them, you saw that pain, that respect in their eyes (interview 23_M61).

One interviewee tells an emotional story of when the school headmaster went to the boy's family to personally apologise for an injustice he had suffered because of the school system:

Someone came and said: "Oh Uncle Bilal, Oh Uncle Bilal, they are looking for you at the door, a man came on a bicycle". Says dad "what do they ask me?" 40 degrees, there was someone outside. [...] When we go there, we find the headmaster of the high school, Sokrat Lika. "Dad", I said, "he is the headmaster". The work of a good and humane man, the wonderful Sokrat Lika. He shook hands with us. "O Meti's father, something serious has happened to your son, yes, I have children too, and I felt like it had happened to my son. I am a high school headmaster, regardless of who did this job, I am a high school headmaster, morality brought me here to apologise". "May you have a white cheek" says the father "I would like my son to be grateful". And I wrote a poem for him, the poem "The True Apology of Teacher Sokrat". [...] I remember this good and monumental act that this Sokrat Lika did to me. I have forgotten what happened to me, that is where my life began. I never forget it

(interview 3_M65).

In addition to the school, the interned children and youth could rely on the wider camp community, which was the most important socialisation agency for them. The various families living in the barracks came from an upper-middle class background, were often part of the Albanian intellectual class, were educated and spoke many foreign languages, as reported by interviewees:

Most of them were intellectuals with two or three faculties, with three or four foreign languages, when speaking you had to think well, so I had the same parents (interview 7_M70).

The interviewees proudly describe how the camp environment in which they grew up and in which they were educated was an asset, the culture in which they were immersed produced positive effects in terms of education from which all internees benefited, not only the youngest:

Because in Savër there was no district or province in Albania that did not have its representatives, that did not have its dialects, that did not have its culture. Even if it was peasant culture, for example when people came from the border area; also the intellectual culture that were families who were among the most intellectually esteemed and who were part of the society in Savër and this kind of reality produced an extraordinary positivity. Because it created a kind of common defence, it created a kind of rivalry of the boys in their studies, because most of the boys, those who came from the internees, were the first ones in the schools. Although their names never entered the roll of honour, they were undoubtedly the best students. And being better they also created a kind of superiority. And this kind of superiority was the battle these children won because of their background, their abilities, and their courage to be better than someone else who enjoyed privileges (interview 26_M65)

Interestingly, the internment camp itself became in the lives of the internees, but also for those who lived outside as free men, a true educational institution. In practice this is a fundamental function of the internment camp as an educational agency that benefited everyone, youth and adults, internees and freedmen. The Western education that camps intellectuals possessed could not be replaced by any

other state institution because Albania was going through a phase of isolationist politics. The camp thus represented a true cultural resource:

As I said, I was educated and that greatest education was the internment camp because we grew up there and learned with people who had graduated from high schools of the most famous universities in the world, they had graduated from high schools in Rome, Vienna, London, the United States. So, it was a camp that I would call a university, for every person who lived in that camp, I think not only did we children benefit from this university, but those who stayed with us, older than us, also benefited. The rest of the camp also benefited because the camp was divided into two parts, the part of the internees who were called then and the free part who lived in the brick houses which were called then or we who were in the barracks who were called internees. But, in Savër, that image, that part of knowledge, of civilised and western culture and education since then also spread around Savër and in the town of Lushnjë (interview 15_M65).

7. Conclusions

Having examined the testimonies of some survivors of an internment camp in central Albania, the study shows the dynamics of some socio-psychological processes in extreme contexts.

The first process under analysis is the enmification. From the interview excerpts it emerged that the process of making an enemy was systematic and it contributed to dehumanizing the internees, through depersonalization and total exclusion from the rest of society. Another process analyzed is group cohesion. The interviews show that the situation of extreme deprivation in which the internees found themselves contributed to the creation of group identity. In response to the physical and material needs of survival, people have activated mutual aid, which has given rise not only to a form of solidarity, but also bonds of fraternity, strictly connected with the idea of having a common destiny. As for intergroup relations, the interviews show that, except in rare cases, relations with the external population were completely nullified and the internees were subjected to a complete deprivation of essential rights, including the right to care. However, some examples of positive and constructive intergroup relations with some members of the outgroup are reported too. Finally, an important role was played by socialization agencies and in particular by the school: although school attendance represented one of the rare opportunities for the interned children to

come into contact with the rest of free society, the educational institution constituted one of the main of propaganda, perpetuating injustices and segregations. However, the internees capitalize on internal resources provided by the socialization within their ingroup, thanks to specific assets which may be available within the members of their own group.

The reported processes match phenomena addressed within the broader social psychology literature, such as the ingroup-outgroup dynamic with its several cognitive, affective and behavioural correlates.

In conclusion, the testimonies reported show how the phenomenon of resilience of people forced into extreme situations of deprivation, especially social deprivation, passes through the creation of strong ingroup bonds that have the function, not only of overcoming the adversities experienced in common, but also of being decisive from the point of view of identity. Even though the interviewees experienced situations of severe social exclusion in the internment camps, the feeling of pride, and sometimes paradoxically of nostalgia, of belonging to a cohesive group that was able to cope with hardship, deprivation and injustice remains unchanged.

It is interesting how this difficult past is consciously experienced as a fundamental period in the lives of men and women. Belonging to the category of the ex-interned thus becomes from an indelible mark of a social condition to a privilege for having lived experiences that would not have been possible elsewhere.

Having been protagonists, and of course victims, of such experiences confers a special status, a sort of distinguishing trait on those who have been able to transform a personal, family, and social drama into a positive occasion of cohesion and solidarity to which one remains attached for the rest of one's life.

It is in its own way a form of social redemption and revenge against one of the most dramatic periods in Albania's history.

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9. Curriculum vitae

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The situation before and after deportation among the survivors from Hoxha dictatorship regime in Albania

Situata para dhe pas deportimit mes të mbijetuarve nga regjimi i diktaturës Hoxha në Shqipëri

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Riassunto

È stato condotto uno studio qualitativo per descrivere la situazione di queste famiglie prima e dopo la deportazione in due periodi contrastanti. L'analisi delle loro risposte è stata collegata a tre momenti importanti: la vita prima della deportazione, la vita durante il campo e la vita dopo la deportazione. I risultati hanno mostrato che la maggior parte dei partecipanti ha notato il periodo del campo come il periodo peggiore della loro vita, in cui hanno perso se stessi e la maggior parte delle loro famiglie.

Parole chiave

Regime di dittatura; campo; deportazione; sopravvissuto.

Abstract

A qualitative study was carried out to portray the situation with these families before and after deportation in two contrasted periods. The analysis of their answers was connected with three important moments: life before deportation, life during the camp, and after the deportation. The results showed that most participants noticed the period during the camp as the worst period in their lives, where they lost themselves and most of their families. In contrast with these, they have found new mechanisms to survive and collaborate.

Keywords: dictatorship regime; camp; deportation; survivor.

1. Introduction. - 2. Literature Review. - 3. Methodology. - 4. Results. - 5. Conclusion. - 6. Bibliography. - 7. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction

The establishment of the communist regime in Albania and in other European countries have many similarities and differences. There is no doubt that almost all communist countries in Europe and Asia copied the Soviet model of communism. In Albania, as in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Hungary and beyond, communist regimes were established which produced more or less the same consequences for their peoples. Albania implemented the Soviet model of government, but unlike other communist countries in Europe, it built it largely with the direct assistance of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was the first country after the war that officially recognized the Albanian government and established diplomatic relations with it. This means the influence that this state had further on Albania's leadership style.

Communism, in the viewpoint of those who promoted it, was destined to reform human society around the world according to a model that emphasized equality as well as its permanent antagonism. In political systems built based on this ideology, essentially totalitarian, reconciliation was impossible between those who believed in the principles of this ideology and among those who sought another pattern of governance. The will to perpetuate communist regimes and leadership at their head created a system of violence and repression. Denial of fundamental freedoms and social and political rights to individuals of a category of society was argued by official propaganda as a small price to be paid to touch the unfeasible dream of a society without class, without property and without poverty (Pryce-Jones, 1995).

The beginning of the transitional period in Albania and the former Yugoslavia, characterized by war, conflict and mass migration, reinforced this dichotomy. For Western onlookers and participants, the wars and genocide committed in the Yugoslav territory and the political unrest in Albania could be seen as a continuation of the violence and repression of a generalized idea of socialism. Thus subsumed into the frame of trauma, the vastly different transitional periods in the Yugoslav successor states and in Albania could be treated together as a cautionary tale that could justify the long-term political influence (Aleida, 2015).

A transparent representation of what happened in Albania during the communism of Hoxha was dramatically changing the life of many people. It is about time to dig into that history which should be a memory not only for the Albanians but for all the EU citizens. That dictatorship left no room for democratic values, which helps explaining why Albania became so chaotic after the end of that period. No trace of opposition was left as at the dead of this cruel dictator. Because

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he allowed no alternative voices to exist, no one was waiting to step in once he had gone, once the party relinquished control. No nascent “civil society” was there to assume its responsibilities. There was just a vacuum and a great deal of lawlessness. There was no justice for the victims and no persecution for the persecutors. This chapter of history was never fully discussed but it is about time to come to terms with the past. The number of people killed or imprisoned during 41 years of dictatorship were equivalent to more than one thirtieth of Albania’s population at that time. In today’s Albania there is an absolute need to know the facts and the faces of the people, among which many intellectuals and many women, that have sacrificed their life to free Albania from this totalitarian regime. The project by revealing the story and the faces of some of the victims and persecutors aims at creating a case-study for all the European citizens. The research on facts and people shall inform about the diversity of European recent history and the threats represented by totalitarian regimes.

2. Literature Review

The communist regime in Albania, in addition to denying many human rights, created an extensive system of persecution and imprisonment for all political opponents of the regime. Camps and prisons located in different cities of Albania became places of multiple suffering for thousands of families for years during the 45 years of the regime of the former dictator Enver Hoxha. The sufferings and persecutions for this category of Albanian society left their traces in the 23 prisons and 48 concentration camps spread throughout Albania. People were taken in masse and sent to internment camps, where they experienced extreme suffering, where in certain cases there was even death as a result of starvation and other harsh conditions.

The Russian researcher, Andrei Sakharov, has described the ‘gulags’ or labour camps as “places where human life had no value and everything human ceased to exist” (Bergman, 2009).

Communism, in the view of those who promoted it, was destined to reshape human society everywhere in the world (Pryce-Jones, 1995). It was seen as a coercive force that was imposed, and if opposed by the will of the individual was punished in the form of exile, persecution, imprisonment, and execution.

The free will of man no longer existed, and every action would be done under the orders of the People’s Party. For about 45 years, from 1945 to 1990, Albania

went through a difficult period that a society, nation, and state can go through without losing its independence or its existence. It is a known fact that one of the most successful methods to solve a problem is to 'face the problem'. The transformation of the national economy from private to state and centralized became visible (Saraci, 2012).

The violation and sacrifice of every human value by this repressive structure would perpetuate the dehumanization it brought about over the years, becoming an essential process of study. The experience of such events is reflected even today by the people who are descendants and sufferers even after the end of the period of communism. This clearly shows the suffering this period has caused in the families of these people.

Some rules were forced to be used after the decisions made in December 1944 by a certain category of people where landowners, merchants, and former politicians had to leave the main cities of Albania. This resulted in many people being denied the right to return to their homes, which were confiscated and used to house officials of the new regime and families of martyrs of the National Liberation Movement.

Initially, in 1945, private Albanian and foreign companies, with the help of state commissioners, were tasked with directing and collecting information about their activity until liquidation and passing into the hands of the state and the monopolization of the private sector using the sequestration, confiscation law, and the nationalization of private assets and after the centralization until the creation of the joint state property (Saraci, 2012).

From 1945, exile began to be used as another punitive measure against political opponents. Isolation resulted in the creation of a general feeling of superiority by Albanian citizens at that time. However, this psychological illness or superiority complex turned very quickly and radically into an inferiority complex after the fall of the communist regime.

Communist systems are regimes where life has no value and everything human ceases to exist affecting the psycho-emotional aspect of man. During these 30 years after the fall of the communist regime in Albania, public discourse has focused on the need for a balanced history where Albanian communism is given in all its colours.

The denial of human rights, the history of State Security, communist repression, and the system of prisons, internment, and labor camps have begun to find a place in historical studies and research to strengthen the memory of this painful and

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unenlightened part of the world: the history of Albania. Psychological bipolarity is characterized in Albanian society since the dominant political and social generation in Albania was born under the mentality propagated during the communist period.

The worldview of these people was formed according to an illusory reality. A completely different mentality from the one that characterizes the 'western' international community, of which Albania aspires to be a part. The unexpected contact with the rest of the world made the Albanian people realize that they were superior to anyone. On the contrary, they were not leading the race of world progress and prosperity as preached by the communist leadership, but it was the Albanians themselves who just entered the race and had many objectives to fulfill.

The dark side of the communist regime and recovery in the internment camps

The communist regime, which was established immediately after liberation, was based on a two-pillar dictatorship. The first was propaganda, and the other was violence. Which was based on laws that violated every kind of individual right, as well as a system of prisons and concentration camps. Internment means to put a person in prison or some other form of detention, generally in wartime. Existence in the internment camps means the picture of a classless society, based on joint ownership of all resources and all the elements that characterize democracy (AQSH, F. 14/AP (Str), V. 1945, D. 215, fl. 31. Urdhër i Mehmet Shehut, komandanti i Korpusit III, Shkodër për shtabet e brigadave I, XI, XXIII, XXIV, 12 shkurt 1945).

For many years there was a system of internment camps surrounded by barbed wire, very similar to the concept of concentration camps. The internees in the internment camps led a miserable life where the apartment was a shack with abnormal living conditions.

In the camp located in Lushnje, the internees were initially isolated and forced to work in agriculture. They lived in barracks where the dirt, the heavy wind, and the head and body parasites constituted torture in itself. This was for all categories of people, including pregnant women, for whom the allowance was the same.

The internees were listed daily for the appeal at certain times and were forbidden to move outside the village where they lived. For movements outside the village, they had to obtain the operator's permission. Their jobs were the hardest on the farm and deprivations from social life were always present (<https://kohajone.com/historia-e-patreguar-e-kampeve-te-lushnjes/>).

These camps were not built to accommodate families, but they were quickly adapted as concentration or concentration camps, where basic living conditions, food, sleep, and hygiene left much to be desired (Dervishi, 2015). Directly guilty people were not sent to these internment camps, but the relatives of people unwanted by the regime: those who escaped abroad, those who were from the mountains and were organizing resistance against the regime, political prisoners, or partisans who deserted from the communist army.

After 1954, it was no longer a question of closed areas like concentration camps, but of villages from which internees could not leave without permission. Every day the internees had to appear to sign a register at the Security or police office. The most popular areas were the villages in the districts of Fier, Lushnja, Vlora and Berat, but in fact there were villages all over Albania that were used for this purpose. The general criterion continued to be that northerners were exiled to the south and vice versa, thus eliminating contact with the territory of origin and old friendships. The internees mainly worked in agricultural cooperatives, but they often engaged them in public constructions or reconstructions as they also did with political prisoners. The siege was then lifted, but the internees had limited space for movement, and territorial had to appeal in the morning and at dinner, and were never to leave their country without permission (<<https://kujto.al/1954-te-internuarit-ne-kampin-me-tela-me-gjembra-te-lushnjes>>).

3. Methodology

Purpose of the study and its importance.

The purpose of this study is to bring the knowledge of the young generation some historical facts of the totalitarian regime of Hoxha, through the stories of the survival victims. Regarding the main purpose, the study collected some reliable and comprehensive information from survivors of the labour camp in Savër, Lushnje, comparing their lives in different periods. These terms/notions, as the main variables of the study, will serve as a direct contribution for future generation to better know their past and history.

Based on a qualitative perspective we used semi-structured interviews to access the experiences of survivors from the labour camp in Savër, Lushnje. Also, the second objective is to describe what they have in common during two different periods.

The situation before and after deportation

Regarding the purpose of the study, the working group conducted 27 in-depth interviews with labour camp survivors who were located in Albania or abroad. The interview was designed for the purpose of the study and contained questions aimed at gathering as much data as possible about all aspects of life. After reviewing the questions by domain experts belonging to the working group, all partners agreed on a final version. It was then reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee for Research at the La Sapienza University, Rome, adhering to all norms and rules of scientific research. In the first part of the interview, all participants were introduced to the purpose of the study and their roles. For this reason, consent to participate in the study was given in simple and understandable language. The final version of the interview was culturally appropriate and understandable for the survivors.

Interview Guideline

The study was part of a research project “Faces from the past: The fight for freedom and democracy during the regime of Hoxha”. The interviews were divided into four parts, covering four main themes: survivors’ perception of their life in general, survivors’ own experience, survivors’ life narrative and survivors’ current identity, and the last part that included questions about different characteristics of participants such as: gender, age, city, marital status, education level, years of education during the camp, etc. Our study focused mostly on exploring the situation before and after deportation in two contrasted periods including questions comparing these periods – i.e., “How was your life before and during the camp?; Please say how you continue life including your education, partner, children, work, and so on; How was your life after the fall of dictatorship regarding relationships, family, children, work and reintegration?”.

Participants and Procedure

The sample was composed of 27 participants from Albania who have been part of a labour camp in Savër, Lushnjë. Out of them, 30% (N=8) were females, and 70% (N=19) males. The age of 40% of participants (N=11) varies from 70 to 85 years old, whereas 60% of them (N= 16) were from 50 to 69 years old. The marital status of participants, their level of education and years of education within and after leaving the camp, the reason for being part of the camp, years they lived in the camp are some of the other additional questions that were part of the interview. These questions were

included to make different comparisons by integrating more factors and to see if any of these factors play a particular role or effect on the variables of the study.

The participants were contacted before conducting the interview by the working group and familiarized themselves with the aims and methodology of the study. After they agreed to be part of the study, an in-depth interview was conducted with each of them. The interviews were conducted by clinical psychology students, after training they received from the group of experts. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in the city where the participants lived (Lushnje, Tirana, Vlorë, and Durrës) as well as via the zoom platform in cases when they lived outside Albania (Italy and USA). Semi-structured interviews lasted on average more than two hours. They were fully recorded on camera and transcribed with the participants' consent, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

Analysis

Analyses were carried out following the thematic analysis procedure through five stages: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, and defining and naming themes in a codebook. The research team was composed of researchers from Albania and Italy. Analyses were also informed by the consensual qualitative research recommendations to ensure that results reflect the research team members understanding.

So, step by step the procedure went through the following steps:

Transcription. The interviews were transcribed word for word in a narrative way. All the interviews were recorded and after that delivered in a format to be accessed on a laptop or computer. The interviews were transcribed in Albanian language and for each of them was a summary in English.

Coding. The transcripts were analysed to identify key themes, concepts, or patterns regarding their lives before and after deportation. This process involved identifying and coding different words, phrases, or sentences that described their emotions, feelings, situations, etc. The interview was organized regarding different perceptions of their life.

4. Results

The presentation of the results is organized into four parts. First, we address their lives and their perception in general including family, education, and work namely the proportion of people who would continue living in those conditions and the conditions under which they stayed many years within the camp. Second, we present their lives before deportation regarding the reason, family status, their reaction, and so on. Third, we address the situation during the camp with all the difficulties and challenges they faced to. Last we explored their lives after deportation and chose two cases that described better the integration after leaving the camp.

General perception and experience

The participants tell their stories full of emotions, full of suffering, and negative memories. Some of them state that they have not been able to recognize their father, and the family has been incomplete. Their lives have been full of stress, and they have all shown a desire to stay together. Meanwhile, there have been many inequalities regarding education. As interned families, they did not have the opportunity to choose the school they wanted, they felt discriminated. Only a small part of them had the opportunity to continue their education after leaving the camp.

Their perceptions regarding commitment and dedication to children were almost the same. The children in these families lived in very difficult conditions in the camp. Some of them had come at a very young age and did not understand why they had to suffer there. There were also cases when children were born in the camp. They had no rights compared to other children outside the camp. All these experiences caused some of them to have difficulties reintegrating later in life.

Another matter discussed with them was related to the work in the camp. The participants remember it as a very difficult job in agriculture, no one taught or guided them. If things did not go as they should, it was always their fault, and they had punitive measures.

If we do a brief analysis of these results, we see that the general perception of the situation they went through is almost the same. They have stayed mostly alone with their mother in the camp since the father has either left or been killed/convicted by the regime. The families have been denied the right to

schooling and education of their children, they have lived and worked in very difficult conditions.

Table 1. *Categories covering the answers to the perception of general situation question*

Categories	Participants	Categories	Participants
Main descriptions of their lives: regarding family, education and work		Main descriptions of their lives: regarding family, education and work	
<i>Description 1 - family</i>		<i>Description 2 - education</i>	
Stay together wherever they go	16	Not continue education	17
All the family suffered	19	Have not chance to choose	22
Everyone felt stressful	18	Feel unequal with others	24
Family destroyed	23	Feel discriminated	23
The father was not with us most of our lives	16	Have the chance to continue education after the camp	10
We felt the family was not completed	18		
<i>Description 3 - children</i>		<i>Description 4 - work</i>	
Taking care mostly alone, the husband in the prison	15	Agriculture in the camp	25
Lived in hard conditions	23	Very hard work	25
Very difficult to integrate after	16	No one stimulated and orientated them	23
Children not same condition	22	Everything wrong belonged to them	19

The situation before and after deportation

Life before deportation

In the second part of the interview, the study aimed to gather information about their lives before the deportation. They say that they had a normal life, full of problems and difficulties like every Albanian family in that period. They were well-integrated families in a society that enjoyed a relatively high status. The main reason for exile was related to the departure of a relative outside of Albania or in some cases the participation of male members of the family in the war. According to the participants in the study, these were the reasons why their families had the misfortune of being part of the camp in Savër, Lushnjë. The moment of receiving the notice of deportation was filled with anxiety, uncertainty, fear, destructive feelings and surprise as they thought they were families with strong positions. The reactions of friends and relatives have been interesting. They left immediately, they were afraid to talk and communicate with them. In some cases, they wanted to help but felt insecure. They found other forms to communicate through the letters they sent to each other.

Table 2. *Categories covering the answers to the perception of life before deportation*

Categories	Participants	Categories	Participants
<i>Life before deportation</i>		<i>Reason of deportation</i>	
Normal life, working regularly	21	Someone in the family went abroad	19
Well know family	17	Being part of the war	8
Well integrated social and political life	18	<i>Reaction of friends, cousins</i>	
<i>Their reaction when they knew for deportation</i>		Tried to help them	13
Felt not safe	18	Afraid to speak with them	20
Got angry	22	<i>Reaction of community</i>	
Surprised because they were in good positions	18	Wrote letters to each other	
		Good relation in the camp	18

Categories	Participants	Categories	Participants
			19
Everything destroyed	23	They helped us	10
Family was separated	22		

From all the answers given, we understand that their families mostly belonged to the middle class, led a normal life, and enjoyed a good status in society. Immediately their life changed negatively after the exile, having consequences and problems in all aspects.

The situation during the camp

An important part of the interview focused on their life while in the camp, taking into consideration family relationships, work, education, health and communication with others. The participants call the time of their stay in the camp as the darkest period of their lives but filled with many memories that they had created together. Despite the discomfort, anxiety, boredom, and difficult conditions, the families found the strength to live.

They encountered many difficulties in the economic aspect and the conditions of the house where they lived for many years. The buildings were roofless, and they slept together with other people. Hunger and lack of food prevailed to extreme levels where they did not even have the opportunity to buy basic food. Except all, they also encountered many beautiful things, such as: learning new languages, being surrounded by the most intellectual people of the time, socializing with others, attending each other's weddings, and even family members who were outside the camp, despite the difficulties they faced. They described their lives and education as difficult and that they were deprived of the opportunity of high school or the education they wanted. They were constantly involved in various and difficult works which shows that not everyone behaved well, especially people with authority, some of whom exceeded their duty.

Life after deportation

The last part of the interview focuses on their life after leaving the camp, considering the possibilities to reintegrate in all aspects. For a significant part of the participants, this was a difficult process. They had lost all connection and

The situation before and after deportation

contact with life outside the camp. Some of them left the country and have not returned, and some others have found different ways to fulfil their dreams and desires. Meanwhile, some could no longer find their way, as the experience they went through had great consequences. Among the main emotions they shared during the interview were: feelings of pessimism and loneliness, everyone had created their own life, had difficulties understanding how they could fit into society, having to start everything from the beginning. Despite the challenges, some of the families managed to follow their dreams and today are well integrated into society. There were also those families who did not get what they expected and face difficulties even nowadays.

Among the 27 persons interviewed, we chose two participants: one who had a better life after leaving the camp and one who have not changed his situation, to better explain the reintegration of them.

The person with better life: pseudo, age, description of the situation

Interview number 18, 77 years old. After being released from the camp, he graduated from the Faculty of Law and in '93 was employed in the archives of the Ministry of Interior and was told that if he finished the school of the Ministry of Interior, the law exams would be recognized, as well as some 3-4 subjects in the field. He also enrolled in the school of the Academy of the Ministry of Interior. Since the law exams were recognized, he completed it in two years, in 1998 he graduated and received the academic degree. He worked from '93 until 2002. Then, in 2002 he was elected General Director of the Institute for the Integration of the Former Persecuted. Of course, like all former persecutors, he also feels nostalgia for those memories but prefers to use intellectualization to protect himself from re-experiences.

The person who has not changed the situation: pseudo, age, description of the situation

Interview number 25, 60 years old. He reported high poverty making living difficult. They have had the support of other camp individuals but not that of state employees whom he describes as harsh, violent and unjust. He enjoyed the right to go to weddings and funerals of people inside the camp but movements outside it were monitored and most of the time impossible, especially when the relatives

were too far away. He had the right to marry and raise a family, however the class struggle had made it possible for marriages to take place by chance. The war of the classes and especially of these persecuted individuals had been felt since the education system, so he was raised in such a way that he was despised, discriminated, and not allowed to take part in the dance evening.

5. Conclusion

Communism, in the view of those who promoted it, was destined to reshape human society everywhere in the world according to a pattern that was frustrating and violent. The denial of basic, social and political freedoms and rights to individuals of a category of society was argued by official propaganda as a small price to pay to touch the unrealizable dream of a society without classes, without property and without poverty. The persecution of any individual deemed dangerous to the power of the communist leadership and the indoctrination with Marxist ideology and its derivatives of the rest of society is one of the main legacies of communism.

After 30 years, it seems quite impossible to recover the pain of thousands of Albanians who suffered the communist dictatorship as the horror of the concentration camps continues to be a dark stain in the history of Albanian communism.

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7. Curriculum vitae

Eralda Zhilla is a full-time professor in the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Tirana, specializes in clinical psychology. She has 17 years of teaching and research experience in the fields of education and psychology sciences.

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Society in turmoil: The first economic reforms of a communist nature and the social consequences in Albanian society (1945-1948)

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Abstract

By the end of the WWII, Albania followed a centralized and planned economic policy and the Soviet model was undertaken. The economy was the reflection of the political alliances that Albania created within the socialist world. Like King Zog, his political opponent, Hoxha also followed a policy of alliances to help the economic reconstruction of the country. Relations with Yugoslavia were strengthened in 1944-1948 with a series of economic treaties signed to bring the country out of the post-war emergency phase.

Keywords

Economy; Nationalization; Centralized economy; Industrialization.

Riassunto

L'Albania, dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale, seguì una politica economica centralizzata secondo il modello sovietico. L'economia era il riflesso delle alleanze che l'Albania aveva creato all'interno del mondo socialista. Come il re Zog, anche il suo avversario Hoxha seguì una politica di alleanze per favorire la ricostruzione economica del paese. I rapporti con la Jugoslavia furono rafforzati tra il 1944-1948 con una serie di trattati siglati per far uscire il Paese dall'emergenza del dopoguerra.

Parole chiave

Economica; Nazionalizzazione; Economia centralizzata; Industrializzazione.

1. Introduction to Albanian economic history: ideological readings and historiographical review. - 2. Albania towards political and economic isolation, Yugoslav influence. - 3. Albanian-Yugoslav political and economic relations (1944-1948). - 4. The new institutional framework of the Albanian economy. - 5. The state monopoly in the monetary and financial sector. The birth of the Albanian State Bank. - 6. Conclusion. - 7. References. - 8. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction to Albanian economic history: ideological readings and historiographical review

The period between the two world wars has been treated by Albanian historiography in a very ideological manner. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that economic history has had greater space only in the last two decades. Albanian historians of real socialism had commonly concentrated their works on political history, the history of international relations and military history. During totalitarianism (1945-1990) political publications occupied the most important place in Albanian publishing and recorded the largest circulation. In particular, 'ideological' works had to be purchased compulsorily by all intellectuals, advised by the Albanian Communist Party itself. In the period between 1965 and 1980 the overall circulation of political-social literature was 6,000,000 copies, with an average of 50,000 copies per work. Titles particularly relevant to communist ideology reached an average of 100,000-300,000 copies (Hidri, 2013, p. 60).

During the 20th century, in Albania, economic history was not considered an academic discipline. Even today, in the five public universities in the country where degree courses in History are held, there is a lack of disciplines relating to economic history¹. The years between the two world wars are interpreted as years in which the Albanian people were governed inadequately, the rulers exploited the people for personal reasons and are often accused of having opened the doors to Italian influence on the national economy. All the texts that have dealt with economic issues have used political ideology as historical research tools and have almost always seen those years as endless suffering for the Albanian people. The monograph by Ilaz Fishta and Veniamin Toci, *Gjëndja ekonomike e Shqipërisë në vitet 1912-1944, prapambetja e saj, shkaqet dhe pasojat* (The economic situation of Albania in the years 1912-1944, backwardness, causes and consequences), published in 1983, can be taken as a model to understand how communist historiography worked; in the introduction Fishta and Toci state their guidelines:

To write this book we based ourselves on the Marxist-Leninist theory on the role of the economy and various factors in the development of society. We were helped by the conclusions of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin on the factors of the development of capitalism, its characteristic before and after the First World War (Fishta - Toci, 1983, p. 5).

¹ Economic history courses are held only in the Faculty of Economics.

To understand how this historiography represented the studies of Western historians in those years, we could quote the introduction of the book again:

Italian, French, English, American, German, Austrian, Yugoslavian etc. historians have also written about the Albanian economy. In general these analyzed the situation from the bourgeois point of view, to help the penetration of foreign monopoly capital into Albania (Fishta - Toci, 1983, p. 7).

As we have seen, the few works of economic history that developed during the years of communism are unable to be free from the ideology of the regime. Furthermore, in the current historical-economic literature, the two periods are portrayed in a totally positive and negative way. In the period 1945-1990 the economic policy of the regime is interpreted by Albanian historians as the only way to bring Albania out of the economic Middle Ages, and when the periods prior to 1945 are studied (both the twenty years Zog and the five centuries of Ottoman rule), they are treated as negative. Even today there are no works of Albanian economic history for the Ottoman period, where the history of agriculture, trade, family, currency and production is analyzed, thus responding to many misunderstandings about that historical era. Regarding the period of the Albanian monarchy, the historiographical problem changes due to the scarcity of works and interest on that era, furthermore all the works are analyzed using criteria that are not very scientific and very ideological. In one of his numerous works on the economic situation of Albania, the historian Iliaz Fishta, involuntarily, makes us aware of the gravity of the historiographical problem, in his introduction to the book *Ndërrhyrja e kapitalit të huaj dhe pasajat e saj skllavëruese për Shqipëri 1931-1936* (The intervention of foreign capital and its heavy consequences on Albania 1931-1936). In fact, from the guidelines of his work we read:

Enver Hoxha's analyses, conclusions and works serve as a compass of orientation for our Marxist-Leninist historiography, for the study of the history of the country, and for the study of intervention of foreign capital in our country, especially during the Zog years (Fishta, 1989, p. 5).

An important role in the attempt to describe the economic and social past of the country was that of two economic magazines, published between the years 1954-

1990: *Popular Economy*, published in the years 1954-1972, and *Economic Problems*, published between 1973 and 1990. The two magazines hosted a large number of interventions by Albanian historians, with the aim of creating the first serious attempt at creating a national economic historiography.

Instead, the interests of European studies, in Italian, French and English, are much broader than those published in Albanian. According to Paolo Tachella, reference must be made to a bibliography of approximately 250 titles, including monographs and articles, regarding the Italian, French and English linguistic areas².

2. Albania towards political and economic isolation, Yugoslav influence

Italian troops landed in Albania on 7 April 1939. They defeated weak resistance led by a few nationalists and forced King Zog into exile. The Albanian crown united with the Italian one. The crown was offered to Vittorio Emanuele III by Albanian notables assembled by the Italians. The Italian King accepted it. This marked the initial steps of a fast process ending independent Albania (Borgogni, 2007, p. 376). The Albanian region was important for Italians to extend their influence in the Balkans. The region's geographical position contributed to this significance.

Albania is the Bohemia of the Balkans, whoever has Albania in his hands has the Balkan region in his hands. Albania is a geographical constant of Italy. He assures us of control of the Adriatic (...) no one enters the Adriatic anymore (...) we have widened the bars of the Mediterranean prison³.

The Italian administration took two approaches. First, it focused on strengthening Albania politically and economically through various agreements. These agreements covered areas such as customs union, armed forces, and diplomatic representation. Second, it aimed at a complete assimilation into the political-administrative system. In this fragile political situation, the first armed

² Tachella, Paolo (2006) 'Temi e questioni di storia economica dell'Albania dalla dominazione ottomana al crollo del comunismo. Una rassegna bibliografica,' *Storia Economica*, Anno IX, n. 1, pp. 139-177, <www.osservatoriobalcani.org/.../Storia%20economica%20albanese.pdf>.

³ Benito Mussolini, meeting of the Grand Council of Fascism on 13 April 1939.

groups opposing the Italian occupation began to form. The most significant event was the formation of the Albanian Communist Party in November 1941. This led to partisan resistance, which collaborated with Tito's Yugoslav Communist Party⁴.

With the formation of the Albanian Communist Party, the history of Albania begins within the field of real socialism. Historians have discussed the Yugoslav contribution to the PCA⁵. After 1939, Albania's relations with the Slavic state began warming up⁶. This shift occurred due to the new reality following the occupation

⁴ The Albanian Communist Party (Partia Komuniste e Shqipërisë) was founded in 1941. In 1948, it changed its name into the Party of Labour of Albania (Partia e Punës e Shqipërisë). The PPSH was a Marxist-Leninist party. It embraced the most orthodox communist vision. He seized power in Albania in 1946. He established a highly repressive dictatorship in the Soviet bloc: (1985) *Historia e Punës së Shqipërisë*. Tirana: State Edition.

⁵ Between 1944 and 1948, Albania and Yugoslavia collaborated closely. The leaders and historians highlighted the Yugoslav envoys' role in creating the PCA. After the 1948 rift, communist historiography criticized Yugoslavia as imperialist and a traitor to communist ideals. From that moment on, Yugoslavia's role in the creation of the PCA disappeared from the history books. After the fall of the communist regime in 1992, Albanian historians took a more professional approach to forming the Communist Party. The first communist groups in Albania were created at the end of the 1920s with people who had made contact with communist ideas abroad. The first communist groups were: The Korca Group created in 1929, in which a significant number of young employees and artisans participated. From Korca's group came the first high leaders of the post-war Albanian Communist Party such as the Minister of the Interior Koci Xoxe, Koco Tashko, Ali Klemendi etc; the Communist Group of Scutari created in 1934; the communist group of "Youth"; the "Fire" Group and the Trotskyist Group of Tirana. In this regard, see the extensive literature including K. Frasheri, *Historia e levizjes së majte në Shqipëri 1878-1941*, ASH, Tirane 2006; *Historia e Partisë së Punës të Shqipërisë (Second Edition) "8 Nëntori"* Tiranë 1981, U. Butka, *Lufta Civile në Shqipëri 1943-1945* Drier, Tirane 2006. H. Neuwirth, *Qëndresë dhe bashkëpunim në Shqipëri*.

⁶ During the years between the two World Wars, difficult political relations were not a valid reason to stop economic relations between the two states. Trade between the two countries was important, as demonstrated by the data from 1930 when Albania exported 444,659 gold fr to Yugoslavia and imported 2,554,100 gold fr. Bakalli, E. (1997) *Marredhëniet Ekonomike Shqipëri-Jugosllavi 1929-1930*, Koha, Prishtine, pp. 81-83. On the relations between the two countries in the first decades of the 20th century, I also refer to the Albanian historian Milo, Pascal (1992) *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927*, 8 Nentori, Tirane.

of the Balkans by Nazi-fascist troops. This change positively affected Albanian-Yugoslav relations. The history of these relations involves Kosovo. Great Serbia aimed to expand Yugoslav borders into Albanian territories in the 19th century. These two problems were initially ignored for months. The risk to the nations outweighed historical differences⁷. Belgrade led the Albanian resistance against Nazi-fascist troops. Two emissaries, Miladin Popovic and Dushan Mugosha, were involved. Stavro Skendi, an Albanian historian, stated that: "Popovic and Mugosha founded the Albanian Communist Party. They chose the Central Committee delegates. In truth, they were the real PCA leaders" (Duka, 2007, p. 215).

The Yugoslav influence was sanctioned in the Permet Congress (24-28 May 1944). It continued until 1948 in the Albanian government. The Congress was organized based on the Yugoslav model 1943 in Bosnia. The congress supported creating a Balkan Confederation based on Yugoslavian indications. The Declaration of the Permet Congress states:

Our people's war is strongly connected to the anti-fascist bloc's war this war shows our people's solidarity with others seeking freedom, especially in the Balkans. This will produce the conditions for the creation of the Balkan Confederation, where all people will have the opportunity to develop and move forward in all fields. This creates conditions for a federation impacting European policy development⁸.

Albanian-Yugoslav relations developed in three main phases:

1. Preparation of the legal and economic framework for cooperation includes economic, monetary, financial, and customs areas.
2. A common policy on regional and international problems.
3. The end of the relationship between Albania and Yugoslavia in 1948.

The first phase started after Albania's liberation in November 1944. The countries established diplomatic relations⁹. The Albanian government, elected on 2

⁷ During the first half of the 20th century, Albanian-Yugoslav relations followed highs and lows depending on the foreign policy objectives of the Yugoslav state. In 1922 diplomatic relations were reactivated but they were cold and without active collaboration. Furthermore, these relations were marked by the Italian-Yugoslav rivalry on the Eastern Question, where Albania was at the center of both diplomacies.

⁸ AQSH, *Relacion mbi Kongresin e Permetit*, f. 12, years 1944, p. 39.

⁹ The Albanian ambassadors to Yugoslavia for the years 1944-1948 were: Tuk Jakova for the years 1945-1946, Hysni Kapo for the years 1946-1947, Ramadan Citaku for the years

December 1945, led by Enver Hoxha, will be recognized on 1 May 1945¹⁰. On 17 December 1945 the General Assembly met to decide on two important points: the form of the regime and the Constitutional Charter. The Assembly's work started on 10 January 1946. The People's Republic of Albania was declared a day later. On 14 March 1946, the Constitutional Assembly, now the People's Assembly, ratified the Statute. The Statute established the Republic's political, social, and economic structure (*The History of the Albanian People*, vol. IV, 1982, p. 175). On 18 March 1946, the People's Assembly assigned the leader of the Albanian Communist Party to form Albania's first post-war government. The Albanian state's history during real socialism starts with the first Hoxha government.

The relations between the two states were now consolidated in an important way. This fact was confirmed by the visit of the leader Hoxha in Belgrade with a significant number of ministers from 23 June to 2 July 1946¹¹. The Albanian newspaper, the Union (*Bashkimi*):

reported that Hoxha received all required honors in Belgrade. The atmosphere in the streets of Belgrade was described as celebratory as General Hoxha was greeted by

1947-1948. All three ambassadors spent most of their lives in prison after the break in relations with the Yugoslavs. The first ambassador of Albania to Belgrade was sentenced in 1958 to twenty years in prison, he died in 1959. Hysni Kapo managed to survive the Hoxha purges, from 1940 to 1954 he was deputy prime minister and minister of agriculture. He died in a clinic of Paris in 1979. Ramadan Citaku was condemned several times by the regime. In this regard, see the extensive literature including Kastriot Dervishi, *Historia e Shtetit Shqiptar 1912-2005* cit. A. Musta, M. Kokalari, *Kush ishte Enver Hoxha?* Apollonia, Tirane 1996; M. Costa, *Una fortezza ideologica: Enver Hoxha e il comunismo Albanese*, Anteo, 2013.

¹⁰ Regarding the elections of 2 December 1945, see the extensive literature including F. Fejto, *Storia delle democrazie popolari*, Bompiani, Florence 1953; E. Frabetti, *La particolarità del comunismo del Hoxha*, Futurubili no 2-3, 1996; Amik Kasoruhu, *Un incubo di mezzo secolo: l'Albania di Enver Hoxha*, Besa, Lecce 1998.

¹¹ Exactly the Albanian delegation was composed of the Vice President of the People's Assembly Myslym Peza, General Bedri Spahiu, the Minister of Justice Manol Konomi, the Minister of Economy Nako Spiro, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Nesti Kerenxhi, the Colonel Vasil Konomi, by the Director of the Navy Department Frederik Hada and by the Director of the Military Sector *Sadik Bektashi*, AMPJ, fund 94, file 167, year 1946 *Relacion mbi marrëdhëniet midis dy vEndeve* (Report on relations between the two countries).

Marshal Tito and acclaimed by the people. Since the evening of June 22, the capital of Yugoslavia was prepared to await the visit of the Albanian leader General Colonel Enver Hoxha and other guests who came here for a friendly visit¹².

The article continues: “in the streets and main squares of the city there are large banners that speak of the brotherhood of our peoples (...). Everyone talks and comments on the visit of the leader of the Albanian people, and anxiously awaits the day when he will be among them”¹³.

Understanding the collaboration degree between two states was crucial. They had moved past the Kosovo issue, believing in peaceful future under communist principles. Both countries aimed for mutual development. The Treaty of Friendship and Reciprocity of 9 July 1946 laid the foundation for the economic-political fusion of the two countries¹⁴. The signing of the Treaty caused outrage among nationalist Albanians for betraying Kosovo and drew criticism from the foreign press supporting the new path taken by the Balkan states¹⁵. The Treaty of

¹² *Gazeta Bashkimi* (Union Newspaper), 25 June 1946. The article is titled *General Colonel Enver Hoxha is received by Marshal Tito, and exclaimed by the people of Belgrade*.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ On the occasion of the signing of the treaty Hoxha confirmed that: “The Treaty with Yugoslavia is the most important act that our government carries out in the international field. The signing of this treaty is not a spontaneous event for our peoples, this has deep roots and is based in the history of the development of our peoples, in the war for freedom especially in the common anti-fascist efforts. This act makes the friendship between our peoples and above all guarantees the independence and sovereignty of Albania. This is not just a guarantee; this will serve as the basis for economic and cultural collaboration between the two countries”. See AMPJ, *Report on relations between the two countries*, 1946, d 167, p. 26.

¹⁵ The concerns of an Albanian abandonment of the Kosovo issue were well founded. In an extraordinary meeting of the CC of the PCA after his return from Belgrade, Hoxha was convinced that the issue of Kosovo should no longer be discussed nor even within the ranks of the PCA, «if a member of the Party is clear to him the path of the party, then the issue of Kosovo should also be clear... Is it in our interest to reclaim Kosovo? This is not progressive. When we come to socialism, which means there (in Yugoslavia) and here, and the remnants of capitalism are eliminated, then, in such a situation, Kosovo will be united with the Socialist Republic of Albania. This is the path that Marxism teaches us. We have a duty to fight those who do not understand this. When we make an agreement, we merge customs; this is a step towards socialism and towards establishing relations with Kosovo. The people of Kosovo have all freedoms. He took the land, he has

Friendship and Reciprocity of 9 July 1946 had five main chapters. Each chapter covered collaboration in foreign policy, economic policy, and common defense¹⁶. The Treaty was valid for twenty years, with the possibility of revision every 5 years, until one of the two states decided to denounce it.

When the Marshall Plan was presented in Europe, Yugoslavia promised Albania a two-billion-dinar loan. The agreement was signed on 12 June 1947¹⁷. This was the Slavic state's response to American aid for the peoples who had been destroyed by the Second World War. It is no coincidence that the two states chose the same day to publicly refuse aid from the Marshall Plan. Albania decided not to participate in the Paris Conference on 10 July 1947. The conference scheduled for 12 July 1947 would discuss economic aid from the United States to Europe. The official note of protest was delivered to the British ambassador in Belgrade. Hoxha rejected Albania's historical possibility of accepting American loans. He now chose the Yugoslav road as a point of reference in the political-economic field. In a visit to the south of the country in the city of Vlore on 2 October 1947, the Albanian prime minister declared that he was sure of complete national reconstruction thanks to the economic help of Yugoslavia¹⁸. A choice that can only be explained by the personal ties of the Albanian leader supported for years by the Yugoslavs in Albania who would guarantee his personal power. Hoxha wrote *Titisti* in 1982. His thoughts had changed completely. The history between the PCA and the PCJ from the summer 1943 to the end of 1948 showed a struggle. This struggle involved attempts to subjugate and enslave the Party by the CPY and the Yugoslav State. Our new State and leadership heroically resisted. They avoided submission and faced betrayal without hesitation (Hoxha, 1982, p. 34).

3. Albanian-Yugoslav political and economic relations (1944-1948)

After the end of the Second World War, the economic situation in Albania was very difficult. The economic life of the country was totally paralyzed not only due to the damage of the war but above all by the new economic policy undertaken by

the schools. We are the best friends of the Yugoslavs», N. Plasari, L. Malltezi, *Mardheniet Shqiptaro-Jugosllave 1945-1948*, GJ. Fishta, Tirane 1996, p. 73-74.

¹⁶ Stalin also welcomed the signing of the treaty as Radio Moscow also welcomed this act in its Albanian language broadcast on 12 July 1946. "This treaty represents a new contribution to security and peace in the Balkans and around the world": Dedijer, V. (2005) *Mardheniet shqiptaro-jugosllave*. Tirane: Medaur, p. 141.

¹⁷ *Gazeta Bashkimi* (Union Newspaper), 17 luglio 1947.

¹⁸ *Ibi*, 3 ottobre 1947.

Albania after 28 November 1944. The two pillars of economic growth of Albania before the war were the Albanian capital and the foreigner who, invested according to a capitalist logic during the twenty years of Zog, had led to a general modernization of the country. With the political elections of 2 December 1945, won by the Albanian Communist Party with Yugoslav support, it was immediately understood that the country's economic development model would be oriented towards planning and centralization. From this perspective, private capital no longer found the necessary space to integrate into the new economic reality that was created in Albania after 1945. Furthermore, it was the sector that was most affected by the first phase of the post-war Red Terror.

In this situation, Albania needed the support of a more developed country for its economic rebirth¹⁹. During Hoxha's visit to Belgrade, the two countries signed an economic collaboration agreement. It is known as the Economic Convention for the Coordination of Plans, Customs Union, and Equality of Currencies.

Intense economic relations in Albania reveal the complex political structure. Albanian-Yugoslav relations show mutual interest. The Albanian communist party allied with Yugoslavia to consolidate power. The latter was ready to help a country it had tried to occupy in the 19th century. Now, under the mask of socialist brotherhood, the Slavic state was smoothly assimilating Albania. b) the vital need of the Albanian economy for capital and foreign investments, both private and state.

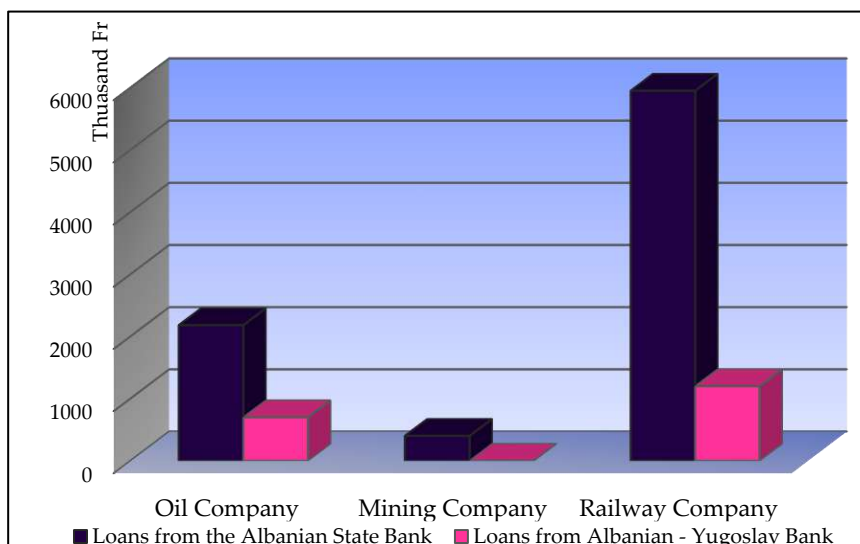
One of the first provisions of the Economic Convention was the parity between the Albanian and Yugoslav currencies. The disagreements between the two parties grew stronger. The Albanian currency had more purchasing power than the Yugoslavian dinar after the war. In September 1947 the cost of living for a family of four in Tirana was 408.44 Albanian francs while in Belgrade it was 5,140.50 dinars (Fishta -Toci, 1984, p. 382). In accordance with these data the real ratio between the Albanian franc and the Yugoslav dinar would be 1 to 12,586 dinars. The Yugoslavs did not accept this rate and proposed the exchange rate of 1 to 8 Yugoslav dinars. In July 1947, the Albanian franc was replaced by the Lek at a ratio of 1 franc.

¹⁹ In truth, since March 1945, Albania had signed a commercial treaty with Yugoslavia according to which all the reserves in the warehouses of oil, wool and other agricultural products were exported to Yugoslavia which sold cereals and military vehicles as compensation. Bashkurit, Lisen (2003) *Diplomacia shqiptare në fillimet e luftës së ftohtë.* Tirane: Geer, p. 133.

Albanians would have been equal to 9 leks, or 9 dinars. The equation of the two currencies with these figures did not reflect the real value of the coins in the market. The Albanian currency was stronger than the Yugoslavian one. This was due to larger reserves of products used as collateral. The strength was also supported by the post-war industrial and agricultural growth.

Furthermore, the agreement for the construction of joint ventures with mixed capital in Albania was signed in July 1946. The agreement involves several companies: the Railway Construction and Operation Company, the Electrical Energy Production and Operation Company, the Mineral Exploitation Company, the Oil Extraction and Exploitation Company, the Maritime Navigation Company, the Import-Export Trading Company and the Albanian-Yugoslav Bank. In these mixed companies the Albanian capital would have been composed of the territory and the structures. The Slavic state financed the technological construction by providing machinery. In accordance with this agreement the companies operated under the Albanian legal framework and the agreement would be valid for thirty years. These agreements were an important step towards the consolidation of political relations between the two states and above all towards the full integration of the Albanian economy into the Yugoslav reality. The Yugoslav capital invested in joint ventures in Albania was considerable. In 1947 alone, the Yugoslav side had to invest 600 million lek in machinery. In reality in the two-year period 1946-1948 the Slavic state was unable to respect its economic commit.

Graph 1. Bank loans to joint ventures. **Source:** Fishta - Toci, 1984, p. 405.



4. *The new institutional framework of the Albanian economy*

With the inclusion of Albania in the Eastern Bloc it was clear to everyone that the institutional structure of the country had changed. The nationalization of the National Bank, agrarian reform, and seizing properties of Albanian capitalists established the new republic's socialist direction. The National Bank was nationalized, agrarian reform was implemented, and properties of Albanian capitalists were seized to set the new republic's socialist direction. The communist leaders did not judge the radical change positively. They viewed the experience accumulated between the two World Wars as a degenerate form of liberalism. This had led Albania towards bankruptcy. A failure that was organized by internal political interests with the collaboration of the international factor. Already during the war, the communists had propagated the idea that the Second World War was the last act of Western liberalism in the world. Albania needed a political and economic revolution like Lenin's Russian example for social peace. To transition from private capitalism to centralized planning, state institutions needed restructuring. They would have had the task of organizing all the technical issues of the socialist economy. On 13 January 1945 the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council issued three important decisions for the planning of the state economy. With this decision three important bodies were created such as the Economic Council²⁰, the Planning Commission²¹ and the Directorate of Statistics²².

The Economic Council had the main task of drawing up economic plans according to government directives. The Council was composed of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, the Minister of Public Works, the Minister of Social Assistance and the Minister of Finance. The Council, a research body, advised ministries on economic development plans. It submitted these plans to the Council of Ministers for approval²³.

²⁰ *Official Gazette*, no. 3, 23 January 1945, *The decision to create the Economic Council*, no. 93, 13 January 1945.

²¹ *Official Gazette*, no. 3, 23 January 1945, *The Decision to create the Plan Commission*, no. 34, 13 January 1945.

²² *Official Gazette*, no. 3, 23 January 1945, *The Decision for the creation of the Statistics Directorate at the Council of Ministers*, no. 35, 13 January 1945.

²³ Article 1 The law on the Creation of the Economic Council expressed the main objective for the creation of the Council: "Due to the strong need for a general economic plan, the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council decides to create the Economic Council, from

The Plan Commission was the technical body of the Economic Council. This body included specialists from all those ministries that participated in the Economic Council. The Plan Commission constructed projects for each minister. The Economic Council could accept or change them before sending to the Council of Ministers. The skills and functioning of this body were complex, given the volume of work that passed through its hands. In this way the Plan Commission changed in size in August 1946, obtaining not only planning but also executive skills.

The Economic Council and the Plan Commission created the Directorate of Statistics at the Council of Ministers. This directorate had the task of organizing the statistical information service in Albania. The main task was the processing of data that came from the party's Central Committee, the Council of Ministers and other state institutions in Albania. In this way the foundations were laid for a national statistical service that would help the country's economy.

The Plan Commission was reformed in July 1945 along with the Economic Council. It became the Economic Reconstruction Commission (CRE). The CRE was made up of twenty-five specialists appointed by the Economic Council. The CRE had a complex organizational structure. Different sectors managed various aspects of socialist economy projects. The decisions of January and July 1945 in their complexity played an important role in the organizational preparation of the Albanian state towards a socialist economy. Both bodies were established in November 1944 after the country's liberation. The economic and political situation was critical. During the economic crisis, the two bodies prioritized infrastructure, the economy and social issues. This focus led to positive results. Communist power grew in the country. Government had high expectations. The two bodies had to respect the executive's requested pace. The State directs the economy per the Statute of Albania.

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where the economic plan of the country for a certain time". *Official Gazette*, no. 3, 23 January 1945, *The decision to create the Economic Council*, no. 93, 13 January 1945, article 1.

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On 19 August 1946, the law on the general plan in economics and planning bodies was decreed²⁵. With this law a decisive step was taken towards a general plan to respond to the economic needs of the moment. The law 283, article 1, emphasized the importance of the provision is described,

for the restoration of the national economy, and for the full development of all its branches, to improve the life and expectations of the population, for the right exploitation of state enterprises and underground resources, to ensure the correct use of all material resources and economic powers of the country, the state conceives the general economic plan, so that the national economy is directed on the basis of a state plan only²⁶.

The state creates a general economic plan to guide the national economy. The plan aims to restore the economy, develop all sectors, and improve people's lives. It also ensures proper use of state enterprises, resources, and economic powers.

At the same time, the legal power of general plans in economics was clearly defined. The article 4 of the law stated that plans with a long-term perspective and in implementation had the force of law. These plans had to be applied throughout the territory of the People's Republic of Albania by all state bodies and collectives. State bodies implemented economic measures and controlled the private economy

²⁴ Statuti i Republikës Popullore të Shqipërisë, "Bashkimi", Tiranë: 1946, Article 1, p. 1.

²⁵ *Official Gazette*, no. 86, 11 September 1946, Law no. 283, 19 August 1946, *The decision to create the Economic Council*.

²⁶ *Ibi*, article 1.

based on the general economic plan²⁷. The main tasks of the Plan Commission according to the law of August 1946 were:

I. The national economic development had to align with the Plan for rational growth in all economic sectors. This growth should be based on national priorities.

II. To propose to the Council of Ministers the quantity of goods that had to be preserved as state reserves.

III. To organize all scientific research and for socialist economic development.

IV. Prepare and present the long-term economic plan, annual plans, financial and economic plans for all state industry branches. This included agricultural companies and institutions relying on central bodies.

V. To control all services for the implementation of the Plan throughout the territory of the Republic, to control the entire implementation procedure.

Furthermore, with the 1946 law, the planning bodies of ministries and other central institutions were created. Planning also expanded near the executive committees of the people's councils²⁸. The Directorate of Statistics was under the Council of Ministers. Now, it fell under the State Plan Commission²⁹. The examination and approval of the Plan, as well as the state direction of economic planning, were directed from the center to the periphery according to the directives of the Central Committee of the Party. The People's Assembly as the main legislative and executive body approved the economic master plan of the state. The People's Councils approved the state's perspective plans. The Council of Ministers analyzed and ratified annual plans. State ministries, institutions, and companies developed plans based on their responsibilities and the state's economic plan. The same procedure was also followed by the executive committees of the people's councils who designed their own development plans for the local economy³⁰.

The Planning Commission's functioning and competence aside, planning measures were increasingly urgent in the country's economic activity. Prices and worker categories were planned, with a financial reward for each worker. Planning bodies, state economic companies, and regulated prices laid legal and technical groundwork for a long-term economic plan.

²⁷ *Ibi*, article 4.

²⁸ *Ibi*, article 1.

²⁹ *Ibi*, article 7.

³⁰ *Ibi*, article 20.

5. The state monopoly in the monetary and financial sector. The birth of the Albanian State Bank

The new Albanian government, elected in 1945, started a clear economic policy after WWII. The government's actions left no doubt about its post-war direction. Marxist-Leninist theory states the government should control production and distribution. The policy and agrarian reform are the foundation of a centralized economy. The government controls them. The State gained total control after 1945. Albanian society's economic class found this change dramatic. They were used to economic freedom from Ottoman rule to World War II. During the years between the two World Wars, the Albanian bourgeoisie connected with the international market. They gained experience in free market systems and helped foreign capital to create industrial centers in Albania.

The Council of Ministers' decree on 15 December 1944 imposed state control over Albanian capitalist companies, as well as those in transport and commerce³¹. State control was very strict and followed a complex procedure. A Commissioner appointed by the State was in control. Workers shared responsibility through professional organizations. In this way we had dual control both from the outside, with the Commissioner, and from the inside with the workers. The current accounts of Albanian companies were frozen. Owners could not use them freely. Banks could not make payments without approval. This rigid control by the state of capitalist companies had a double function.

1- The communists reduced the weight of these companies in the economy and society. Capitalist companies built between the two World Wars were owned by the Albanian bourgeoisie who shared political and economic freedom principles. Most of them were sympathizers of the nationalistic factions, antagonists of the Albanian communists during the war and not willing to accept the new political course of the Tirane regime after 1945. These actions were accompanied by strong propaganda and strong retaliation. The law of 15 December 1944 declared company owners who did not cooperate with communists as saboteurs and system enemies.

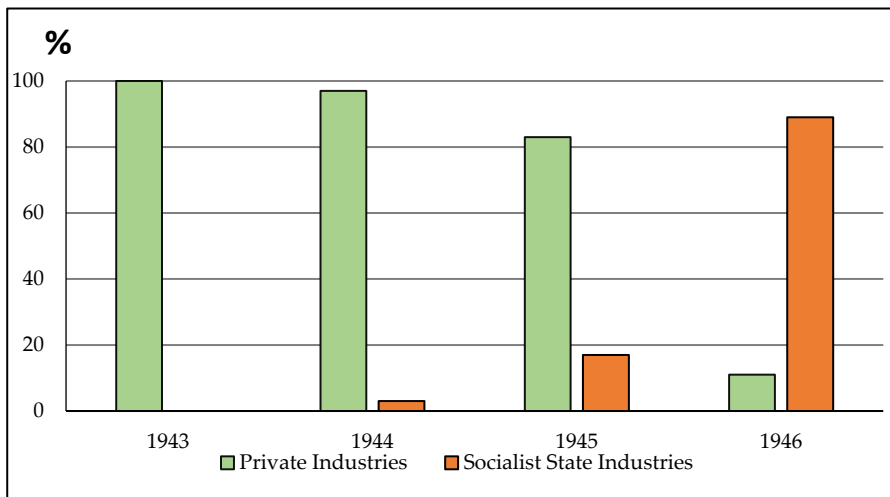
2- The new administration had state control of capitalist companies. It had the general picture of their real weight in the country's economy. The control aided economic planning. It also signaled sectors for nationalization acceleration or

³¹ *Official Gazette*, no. 2, 1944, Law no. 21, 15/12/1944.

retention of old methods. These data accelerated the nationalization process which affected 89% of the industrial sector in less than two years.

Graph 2. The process of nationalization of capitalist industries (1944-1946)

Source: Hoxha, 1952, p. 29.



On 13 January 1945, the law on the confiscation of Italian and German capital found in Albania was issued³². A government commission was created. It included Manol Konomi, Minister of Justice, Ramadan Citaku, Minister of Finance, and Gaqo Tashko, Minister of Agriculture. The Commission's task was to address technical issues with confiscation and coordinate bodies to speed up procurement of Italian and German capital. This was based on guidelines from the First Anti-Fascist Congress on 24 May 1944 in Permet. The Commission made decisions on 27 January 1945 to confiscate AGIP's assets, transferring oil reserves and other assets to state administration³³. On 10 February 1945, the decision was taken to confiscate EIAA and ITALBA's assets³⁴. In May 1945, the Albanian Electrical Company (SESA) had its assets confiscated. This decision placed all the company's power plants in key urban centers like Tirana, Scutari and Vlora under state control. Berat, Fier, Gjirokaster and Kavaje³⁵. The Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Albanian Communist Party started a new phase of nationalization and confiscation. By February 1946, around 90 Italian capitalist companies in Albania got nationalized³⁶.

Name	Number of companies
Industry	11
Construction	25
Transport	15
Commerce	15
Insurance	9
Others	16
Total	90

Table 1. The companies were nationalized until January 1946.

Source: 'Decisions on the confiscation of movable and immovable assets of Italian companies operating in Albania', 26.01.1946, *Official Gazette*, no. 14, 1946.

³² *Official Gazette*, no. 3, 1945, Law no. 36, 13 January 1945.

³³ *Official Gazette*, no. 6, 1945, *Decision of the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council*, no. 49, 27.01.1945.

³⁴ *Official Gazette*, no. 16, 1945, 10.02.1945.

³⁵ *Official Gazette*, no. 11, 1945, *Confiscation Decision*, 12.5.1945.

³⁶ The other nationalized Italian companies were Eaga, Sidokom, Italstrada, Tudini, Talenti, Aurelio Aureli, Celpa, Simoncini, Ferrobeton, Beloti, Elio Federici, Cisa, Fratelli Gondrand, Paskuale Truki, etc.

Some liberal economic ideas circulated within the PCA. Many PCA leaders opposed nationalizing the economy. The most important exponent of this thought was Sejfulla Maleshova, who was in favor of the existence of private capital and the creation of joint companies³⁷. In an article dated 20 February 1945 in the newspaper *Bashkimi*, Maleshova expressed her thoughts on Albania's foreign policy:

the foreign policy of popular democracy is based on friendly relations with allies and in cooperation with all democratic states, especially with great allies such as the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain³⁸.

Furthermore, the professor was against the policy of repression against traders and industrialists. The Albanian Joint Stock Company for imports and exports and the Exhortation were created with 49% private capital shares. The company was created on 10 September 1945 with a capital of 5,000,000 francs. The company's statute allowed interests in other industrial, agricultural, and transport companies. The company earned 332,106 francs in three months. This shows the private sector's role in post-war economic revival. This fact is also reported in the Statute of the People's Republic of Albania, in the second chapter of the Statute. This way of development was in accordance with the 1946 Statute of Albania. The article 6 accepted the existence of the private sector only if it was strictly controlled by the state: "To defend the vital interests of the people, raise the standard of living and to exploit all economic possibilities and potential, the State directs economic

³⁷ Sejfulla Maleshova was one of the most important Albanian intellectuals of the 20th century. Having graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Rome in 1926, he started a new faculty of Philosophy at the Lomonosov University in Moscow, where he became a professor, and from 1933 President of the Faculty. He came into contact with communist ideas. He spoke eight foreign languages and was also one of the important writers of the first half of the 20th century. Sejfulla Maleshova's political career began as a Secretary General of Fan Noli's Government until arriving in 1945 as a Minister of Education in Enver Hoxha's government. In the first year of collaboration with Hoxha he had strong differences with the communist leader, especially on economic reforms, and in foreign policy he was against Albania's pro-Yugoslav policy. In 1946 he was expelled from the Albanian communist party and deported to the district of Fier, where he was forced to do heavy labor to survive. In 1971, Maleshova died forgotten by the regime.

³⁸ *Gazette Bashkimi* (Union Newspaper), 20 February 1945.

development according to a general economic plan. Based on the state economic sector and the cooperative sector, the state exercises overall control over the private sector of the economy" (article 6)³⁹.

The Permet Congress set economic goals. Government intervention in banking and credit was necessary. The National Bank of Albania played a key role in the country's economic development, providing monetary stability and supporting the Albanian bourgeois class in industrial investments. For this reason, the National Bank of Albania was considered by the new communist system as the financial center of the Albanian bourgeoisie, in open antagonism with the communist system. The communist regime aimed to nationalize the Bank. Various technical projects were carried out to take control of the Albanian Bank.

The first nationalization project was formalized even before the liberation of Albania. The project was radical. It envisioned expropriating the bank for public utility and offering rewards to the bank's shareholders. The initial capital of about 3,800,000 Albanian francs had to be reimbursed to the Italian shareholders. The Albanian state had to buy the shares. Then, they had to implement technical regulations for the new Albanian bank. The project involved negotiations with Italian capital on two technical issues. The first was the currency type due to Italian capital being in Fr. gold and not in fr. The Albanians were as expected by the project. They had trouble reaching a compromise with Italian investors to protest a 50-year concession. The project aimed to nationalize the Bank gradually. It included returning capital to Albanian and Italian owners. The Albanian Communist Party did not accept the liberal line of thought. This rejection caused the project to fail. On 13 January 1945, the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council canceled the Albanian National Bank convention and its shareholders. The State did not recognize the former Albanian National Bank's obligations to third parties for gold and foreign currency deposits. The agreement between the Zog Government and the Italian financial group in March 1925 was also cancelled. The organic law for creating the Albanian State Bank was issued on the same day. It had 7 chapters and 26 articles. Dr. Omer Nishani and Secretary Koco Tashko⁴⁰ signed it for the Presidency of the Anti-Fascist Council. Shortly after the creation of

³⁹ The Constitutional Assembly (1946) *The Statute of the People's Republic of Albania*. Tirane: Bashkimi, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Official Gazette*, no. 4, 1 February 1945, *The law on the mooning of the Convention of the National Bank of Albania and its shareholders*.

the Albanian State Bank, two important decisions were taken to completely liquidate foreign capital in the banking sector. On 13 August 1945 National Labor Bank⁴¹ was liquidated while in November of the same year Napoli Bank was also liquidated⁴². State intervention was necessary in other banks operating in Albania with the Albanian National Bank. This was due to their financial importance and branch expansion on national territory, especially during the war.

With these two measures, the activity of these two banks in Albania was interrupted, the accounts of the two institutions, of Italian state companies and companies and of former Italian officials in Albania were confiscated. Furthermore, all movable and immovable assets of these two banks in Albanian territory were confiscated.

6. Conclusion

“What do you know about Albania?” “Nothing”. Probably in the early 1990s, when the global ideological barrier was falling, this would have been the most common response to such a question of rebellion in any Western country. Western countries had little information about Albania: the forty-five years of communist regime had left their mark not only on Albanian society, but also on the perception that Westerners had of the small Republic of Eagles. This was due to the absolute destruction to which Albania was subjected for decades by one of the most ferocious dictators of history: Enver Hoxha. Yet his was the longest dictatorship in European history: four decades led by his personally, with a regime he resisted for 46 years; Albania's was the last communist-style totalitarianism to fall in Europe, when the Berlin Wall collapsed, Eastern Europe freed itself from the Soviet Union, the USSR dissolved and the last great dictator, Ceausescu in Romania, had already been shot.

⁴¹ On 22 January 1945 the activity of the Albanian State Bank began. The main functions were established by the organic law. The Administration of the Bank was controlled by the Control Commission which was appointed by the Minister of Finance. The Bank had the annual budget, which was approved by the Board of Directors, controlled by the Control Commission and sent to the Ministry of Finance. The State guaranteed all the activities of the Bank, according to its organic law. *Official Gazette*, no. 4, 1 February 1945, *The Organic Law of the Albanian State Bank*.

⁴² *Official Gazette*, no. 30, 1945, *Ordinance no. 15 of the Ministry of Finance*, 13.08.1945.

The 'new man' designed by Hoxha had to sacrifice his material interests to the sentiment of belonging to a communist society and a glorious nation. Everything was collectivized. In 1987, the rate of infant mortality, the classic indicator of the socio-economic development of a people, placed Albania clearly in the bottom of all the ranking of the European States, with 44% of deaths in minors, according to the Western font, and 28.2%, according to the Albanian font. In the average of the two Western countries closest to Albania, Greece and Italy, the rate is 13% and 9%, respectively. But perhaps worse was the exclusion of three generations from the historical events of the second half of the twentieth century. The regime has succeeded in completely obscuring the rest of the world in Albania and Albania had become invisible to the rest of the world, describable as an unidentifiable area, located between Yugoslavia and Greece where one could not go, from which no one (or very few) could leave and about which it was possible to know nothing or almost nothing.

But not everything was wrong: several of the regime's policies had a positive impact on society. Education had a strong boost, until the end of the 1980s, about 90% of the population could read and write and all had access to a health service. The electricity came to the most remote in the country, the public building policy was an objective success, and the construction of thousands of apartments took place as a result of the fight against the extended family, favoring the nuclearization of the family. However, these were results that failed to positively change the daily life of the Albanian population. A life which for Ismail Kadare, in an interview with the newspaper *La Stampa*, explains the period of totalitarian religion (Stalinian, Chinese, autarchic) thus:

It was extremely sad. The first sign is repression, then boredom. This sadness is never talked about, yet it was an everyday thing that worried people like repression, violence and dull, dull, poor life went hand in hand. The regime creates an artificial life for itself, a cardboard scenario, because a normal life cannot exist in a dictatorship, the first aim of the tyranny is to deform life, totally disjoin it.

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8. Curriculum vitae

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The repatriation of Albanians from 1946 to 1963 and their integration into the communist society: the case of Korça region

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Abstract

The establishment of communism in Albania and country isolation happened after the WWII. When repression of authorities got stronger, there were individuals who repatriated to Albania. According to documents in the Archives, nothing has been written about them. In this paper, are analyzed data obtained from the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, on time when these people repatriated, countries they came from, reasons of their return, authorities' behavior and their integration to Albanian society of the time.

Keywords

Repatriation; Communism; Albania; State Security.

Riassunto

L'instaurazione del comunismo in Albania e l'isolamento del paese sono avvenuti subito dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Quando la repressione delle autorità si intensificò, alcune persone furono rimpatriate in Albania. La storiografia albanese ha scritto poco su questo fenomeno. Questo articolo analizza i dati ottenuti negli archivi, circa il momento in cui queste persone sono state rimpatriate, i paesi da cui provenivano, le ragioni del loro ritorno, il comportamento delle autorità e la loro integrazione nella società.

Parole chiave

Rimpatrio; comunismo; Albania; polizia segreta.

1. Introduction. - 2. Data on repatriates of Korça Region in the years 1946-1963. - 3. Repatriates and state security. - 4. Repatriates integration in communist Albania. - 5. Conclusions. - 6. References. - 7. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction

Albania, a poor country during its political life, has had high economic and political immigration. The independence of Albanian state in November 1912 created rivalries and political clashes in the country, which resulted in the first political immigrants of independent Albania, while the lack of economic development forced Albanians to leave the country. After 14 months as prime minister, Ismail Qemali left Albania without having the opportunity to return¹. At the end of the First World War, Esat Pashë Toptani was one of the most powerful people in Albania. He had many political opponents in the country who were gathered to prevent him from returning to his homeland, despite the negotiations that took place between parties. His goal was to return at least as head of government, although his ambition was to be placed as the head of the state (Ikonomi, 2016, p. 507).

The intensification of political war in 1924, especially the events that took place in June-December of that year aggravated the political conflicts and as a result a large number of politicians and civil servants left the country. Initially, in June 1924 Ahmet Zogu left the country with his supporters. A Political Court was established in July. 107 people were convicted; including former members of High Council of Regency, Speaker of Parliament, several former prime ministers headed by Ahmet Zogun, as well as several former ministers, deputies, army and gendarmerie commanders (Austin, 2003, p. 106). After the return of Ahmet Zogu into power in December of that year, hundred Fan Noli's supporters left the country as political emigrants (Historisë, 2020, p. 698).

The invasion of Albania by Italy in April 1939 led to the departure of King Ahmet Zogu and many of his supporters who never returned in Albania. The Second World War and the installation of communist regime created another source of political immigrants. A large number of Albanians, collaborators of Nazi-fascism and anti-communists left the country at the end of the war. Most of them received severe punishments and were undesirable to the new regime.

¹ From November 27 to December 7, 1912, Ismail Qemali led the Assembly of Vlorë, where Albania's independence was proclaimed. He was elected the first prime minister of Albania. He was in power until January 22, 1914 when he resigned to pave the way for the implementation of the decisions of the Great Powers, regarding the future of Albania. See: Akademia e Studimeve Albanologjike. Instituti i Historisë. *"Histori e shqiptarëve gjatë shek XX"*. Vëllimi I, (Tiranë: Botimet Albanologjike, 2020).

As soon as they took power, the Albanian communists paid attention to the control of territory and population. In Albania, all those who were considered enemies by the communist party and the new government were arrested. Courts-martial instituted by the National Anti-Fascist Liberation Council sentenced dozens of innocent people to severe punishments, death or long term imprisonment (Butka, 2008, pp. 9-29). In late 1944 and early 1945, was established the People's Defense Division. Based on People's Defense Division was created the Border Force. The Special Border Battalion, placed in Korça, guarded and defended the border from Qafe Thana sector in Pogradec to Ura e Peratit in Përmet. Their task was to control people's movement on the state border of Albania with neighboring countries as well as to interfere with any kind of illegal activity that could be carried out through the state border (Qirici, 2017, pp. 55-56). The strengthening of border control made impossible not only escapes but also legal border crossings.

Parallel to these arrests, were organized operations to catch and eliminate opponents who still lived in Albania. During the years 1945-1947, the anti-communist resistance groups, being fragmented and uncoordinated, were destroyed by the 3rd Communist Corps (Dervishi, 2006, pp. 544-546). While communists' opponents were killed in the mountains or by military courts, their family members were deported to concentration camps, where suffered 45 years of torments (Dervishi, 'Burgjet dhe kampet e Shqipërisë komuniste', 2015 , pp. 7-30). Thus, the only way to escape the communist violence was to flee the country. In the first years of communist power, was possible escape, but with the strengthening of power and border control, escape became very difficult and Albanians found almost impossible to leave the country.

As a result of emigration, in the 19th century after the creation of national Balkan states, several colonies of Albanian immigrants were created in Romania, Bulgaria, and Egypt. At the end of this century and in the first half of the 20th century, Albanians began to immigrate to the USA, Australia, and Argentina and Western Europe countries. The end of World War II found many Albanian immigrants living in these countries. The beginning of the Cold War, the division of the world into two blocs changed the immigration trend, because the irritation of East-West relations also affected people movement. Many of these people left their country because of economic conditions. Their goal was to earn some incomes for their families and then return to their homeland. The establishment of communist regime affected lives of many Albanian immigrants, because it put

them in front of the dilemma of whether to return in Albania or not. A part of them, not having any political activity in Albania, thought to repatriate without knowing that Albania had fundamentally changed. The region of Korça has been one of the regions with large emigration to several developed countries of that time such as: USA, Australia, Argentina, etc. As a border region with two states, this region also had a large number of fugitives who in some cases have been repatriated.

2. Data on repatriates of Korça Region in the years 1946-1963

Based on the documents that we have been able to access until now from the Archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs², it appears that the places from which the Albanians were repatriated in the Korça Region are shown on the table below.

Table no.1 Data were obtained from the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Albania. The table and data are processed by the authors.

The places from which Albanians returned during the years 1946-1963									
Australia	USA	Argentina	Greece	Turkey	Yugo- slavia	Cana- da	France	Italy	Belgium
252	80	16	5	5	4	1	1	1	1

The largest number of repatriates is from Australia, United States of America, and Argentina, followed by other countries. It is difficult to determine all the reasons for the repatriation of Albanians from rich countries to Albania at a time when the communist dictatorship was established.

However, documents give us a number of reasons for their return. Many of them were married and had their families in Albania; some others were old and thought of repatriating to spend the rest of their lives in their homeland. However, the number of repatriations is small if we compare it with the number of economic and political immigrants outside Albania during this period³. If we refer to the

² Arkivi i Ministrisë së Brendshme (hereafter AMB) (Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs), file no. (117) 200, year 1955. Lists of economic returnees from Western countries.

³ It is very difficult to determine the number of Albanian immigrants from the independence of Albania until 1944. In the years 1925-1939 Albanian authorities made efforts to register immigrants and equip them with passports. According to data from

sources of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, between the years 1944 to 1963, 693 people escaped from Korça Region⁴. Meanwhile, the table shows that only 12 political immigrants were repatriated in this period.

The number of repatriates from Western European countries is very small. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of Albanian political immigrants settled in these countries after the war. These political emigrants, being the most educated part of the society, understood the Albania situation better, and at the same time they were quite active in denouncing what was happening there. In western countries there was information that Albania was a dictatorship country where political prisoners were subjected to forced labor. In the first years of communism, these convicts were sent to labor camps and their families were interned (Borici, 2021, pp. 121-122). They had started propaganda about what was happening in Albania. In their testimony, the repatriates testify that during their stay in the city of Bari, Italy, when they were returning to Albania, they met some Albanians who advised them not to repatriate because the situation in Albania was quite bad⁵.

Repatriates in Korça Region divided by years during 1946-1963

Year	1946 1947	1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
Total	3	76	123	7	0	7	1	0	3	6	31	23	37	24	19	3	3
Economic/ Politic	3	76	123	7	0	7	1	0	3	6	30/1	20/3	33/4	22/2	18/1	3	3
Australia	1	76	120	5	0	1	1	0	0	0	12	5	14	10	5	1	
USA	0	0	1	0	0	6	0	0	1	5	12	12	17	12	12	0	2
Argentina			2	1				0	0	0	5	2	3	0		2	1

Albania in the period 1930-1944, 152,000 albanians emigrated. See Akademia e shkencave të Shqipërisë, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, vol. III, *Periudha e pavarësisë 28 nëntor 1912-1939*, (Tiranë: Toena, 2007), 510-522.

⁴ File no. (122) 204, year 1955, *Listat e të arratisurve që kanë vepruar dhe vepronë kundra vendit t'onë fl 1-13*.

⁵ File no. (171) 267, year 1957, reports on returnees from Australia.

Repatriates in Korça Region devided by years during 1946-1963

Others	2			1				2	1	2	4	3	2	1		
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Table no 2. Data were obtained from the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Albania. The table and data are processed by the authors.

Through analyzes of table no. 2, we extract quantitative data, i.e. how many Albanians have been repatriated in these years and when they were repatriated. It is noted that most of them exactly 198 returned during the years 1948-1949, from whom 195 Albanian returned from Australia. In the years to come, the number of repatriates from Australia decreased, occurring at lower rates. This may be related to the fact that at the beginning of the 50s Albanian refugees also arrived in Australia.

From the files of some repatriates, we have evidence that they have started to spread propaganda about the difficult political and economic situation in Albania⁶. Repatriations from other countries are in small numbers, including also immigrants who came from USA. For several years, the number of repatriates decreased up to 1954, when there were no more returnees. This is the period when USA and United Kingdom tried to destroy the communist regime of Tirana by sending armed people to Albania. From 1950 to 1956, the number of repatriates is 24.

For several years there were no repatriates from Australia, starting again in 1957 when repatriations restarted. The number of repatriates began to increase in the following years, reaching 30 people in 1957. In the period between 1957-1961, 133 people were repatriated, the largest number of them coming from USA, followed by Australia. This increase in repatriates is related to the amnesty that the Albanian government made in 1956⁷, because there are some repatriates who testify this fact. This data also appears in repatriates testimony given to the security authorities, that many people who were aware of the amnesty had expressed their own will to be repatriated⁸, in some testimonies was mentioned also the fact that

⁶ *Ibidem*, Relacion mbi të riatdhesuarin N.Q nga Vithkuqi, f. 2.

⁷ Decree no. 2205, dated January 5, 1956 (on the amnesty of Albanian citizens who fled abroad).

⁸ File 168 (264), year 1957, relations on repatriates from Yugoslavia, report on the question of the repatriate E.P from Katundi Potgorie. File no. (171) 267, year 1957, relations on

many people were not repatriated because of the delays in documentation from Albanian consulates⁹. This is related to the care of the Albanian authorities to have more accurate information about the persons who returned.

Age of repatriates												
Age	20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	51-55	56-60	61-65	66-70	71-75	76-80
Total	7	10	22	51	44	48	55	41	40	24	18	6
Australia	3	9	17	45	39	42	46	24	18	1	5	2
USA	1			1	2	1	7	13	19	21	11	3
Argentina			1	2	2	3	2	2	2		2	
Others	3	1	4	3	1			2	1	2		1

Table no 3. Data were obtained from the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Albania. The table and data are processed by the authors.

Important data obtained from the Ministry of Internal Affairs are those related to the age and profession of repatriates. For study purposes, we have divided these into age groups of 5 years. From data analyses it appears that the returned persons are of different ages, but the age groups differ according to the countries from which they were repatriated and the time when they were repatriated. People repatriated from Australia were the youngest. About 201 people belong to the working age group under 55 years old. This is a secondary clue to the reasons of

Australian Repatriates, on the repatriated from Australia I.F. Feim from Sinica village of Bilisht district and resident in the city of Korça, floor 1, *ibid.* On the repatriate from Australia S. GJ. Mico from the town of Osoj i Opari, living in the city of Korça.

⁹ File no. (171) 267, year 1957, relations on returnees from Australia, report on repatriate from Australia named S.T. Dishnica, from Dishnica village and resident in the city of Korça, f. 3.

their return. Since they returned in the first years after liberation, this can be related to the hope that Albania would be a better opportunity for their lives. On the other hand, the returnees from the USA are older. Most of them are over 65 years old. This data makes us think that their repatriation is related to their age, they return to their homeland to spend the last years of their lives.

From the depositions taken by authorities, the reasons for the return are not clear because they were afraid of the consequences and tried to be discreet. Interesting data that emerge from the documents are also those of the education and professions of repatriates. From the documents we have come to the conclusion that repatriates were mainly: farmers, workers, barbers, drivers and less often traders¹⁰. Only two of the returnees practiced the teaching profession in Yugoslavia.

3. Repatriates and state security¹¹

Albanian historiography of the communist period has not dealt with topics related to the movement of Albanians. Documents about refugees and repatriates could not be used by researchers, as they were state secrets. After the fall of communism, various researchers studied the escape phenomenon of Albanians during the communist regime, while there are still no studies on the repatriation of Albanians during the communist period.

The communist government in Albania was characterized by the obsession of having everything under control. This obsession was not only limited within the country but also abroad. The government of Tirana paid special attention to Albanian immigration. During the first two years after the country liberation, Albanian immigration offices in USA and in other countries supported the communist government. The relations between Albanian government and Albanian associations in the USA were strained after the deterioration of the relations between Albanian and American governments. After that, the Albanian government, through its officials, interfered in the activities of Albanian

¹⁰ File no. (117) 200, year 1955, lists of economic repatriates from Western countries.

¹¹ The 1st Branch (part of the 1st Directorate of Security) dealt with the surveillance of two categories of persons, those who entered the country legally, repatriated or as tourists, and those who entered illegally as diversant. (All those Albanians who entered Albania illegally in 1945-1990 with the aim of overthrowing communism, were called diversants).

organizations in the USA, such as Vatra and Shqipëria e Lirë (Free Albania). Through their control, it sought to prevent the entry of political immigrants in them. In order to achieve this goal in some countries, the Albanian government asked for the support of communist parties such as in Australia, Argentina and the USA (Akademia e shkencave të Shqipërisë, 2009, p. 265).

The greatest attention of Albanian government was towards political immigration. The military mission in Bari had accurate data on political emigration to Italy and had forwarded this data to official Tirana (Boriçi, 2021, p. 116). In order to anticipate any kind of possible organization that could endanger the new power in Albania, PKSH (Albanian Communist Party) started its propaganda through exhibitions and documentaries with photographs of the national liberation war. This happened not only in Italy, where were situated most of the political emigrants, but also in America, France, Egypt and Turkey where were sent magazines such as "New Era", "New Albania" etc. (Boriçi, 2021, p. 116).

The Albanian state, based on the fact that its political opponents left the country and could establish their own organizations outside Albania, began to take measures and monitor the political emigrants. At this time, according to a report that the Albanian representative in Rome sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it turns out that there were 1000 Albanians in Italy. Most of them knew the political situation of Albania and only a small number would be repatriated (Padelejmoni, 2021, p. 47). Albanian repatriates were monitored by state security agencies. They were interrogated by the authorities and many of them had files. The group of repatriates was divided into those who had left Albania before November 1944 and these were economic immigrants and those who had fled after the liberation of the country. The second group was the group that caused the most concern to the state security bodies.

When we analyze the archive data of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, we notice that the Albanian authorities were very attentive to the repatriates. By exploring and analyzing the files of these persons, we understand that the security officers were more interested in knowing the location, activity and reasons for repatriation. In relation to repatriates from Australia, the first information required was the personal activity. Then the repatriates were asked about the economic and political activity of the economic immigrants. In the last part, the requested information

was related to the political activity of Albanian political immigrants¹². Thus, a biography was written for the repatriates, which briefly describes their political activity and their family members¹³. This political profile was very important and the behavior of security bodies and other state authorities depended on it. This methodology was used in all reports written by state security bodies. Contacts or relations of people involved in politics were of special importance to the security officer. These data served the security officer to come to the conclusion that the repatriate may or may not be a contingent of foreign services. The tasks that the security bodies had to carry out against these persons were determined on the basis of this data analysis.

In Albanian neighboring countries, that is Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia, the number of emigrants, especially political ones, was greater, but according to the data, repatriates were less since they knew what was happening in Albania¹⁴. Repatriates from these countries were under stricter supervision by the authorities. This is evident in the detailed reports and information that have been compiled for these people. Thus the I. D returned from Yugoslavia gave data on the Albanian political immigrants, their names, where they stayed and the work they performed. He also provided data on Albanians who entered Albania illegally¹⁵.

Even the relatives of the most powerful authorities were asked by security officers. J. Gj, the brother of a senior military officer of the time, was subject to the same procedure. He was questioned and monitored. The security bodies show doubts about his behavior, and every meeting he made in the city of Korça¹⁶.

The data obtained from Greece repatriates are even more interesting. Taking in consideration the conflicting relations between the two countries during this period, the security officers are not only interested in the political and military activity of the Albanian immigrants but also of the Greek state in order to have detailed information on its activity toward Albania. Fugitive repatriates were more

¹² File no. (171) 267, year 1957, reports on repatriates from Australia; on the repatriated from Australia I.F. Feimi from Sinicë town of Bilisht district and resident in the city of Korça, ff. 1-3.

¹³ File no. (168) 264, year 1957, relations on repatriates from Yugoslavia. Report on the question of E.O from S.Poshtme village of Pogradec district repatriated from Yugoslavia.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, file no. 168, f. III.

¹⁵ File no. (143) 236, year 1956, report on the repatriate from Yugoslavia: on the conversation with the repatriate I.D from Potgorie township, born in 1930.

¹⁶ File no. (201), year 1957. Report on the repatriate from Dardha, Korcë district, J. Gj.

closely monitored and described as traitors, dangerous enemies. Repatriated fugitive D.L. Hoxhalli had a voluminous file with detailed information about his entire family. The file describes in detail the organization of Albanians who fled the country, and were put at the service of Greek authorities. There are data on how the fugitives were organized in Greece, their number, their names, where were they from, where did they train, how did they enter Albania, where did they stay, the tasks they were charged with etc.¹⁷ Even other repatriates who had been in Greece were asked in detail about everything they have seen and known¹⁸. These people, knowing the severity of Albanian state security bodies, tried to be honest and persuasive in the information they provided.

4. Repatriates integration in communist Albania

The communist regime installed in Albania was paranoid about any activity that took place outside and inside the country. For this reason, the authorities were very attentive to Albanians who were repatriated. After the war, there were no social programs to help repatriates to integrate into Albanian society of the time. Repatriation and socio-economic integration form an important part of circular migration. Based on the data obtained from returnees' files, at that time did not exist orientation assistance toward employment, housing and other services. Authorities were only interested in the fact that these persons were not a danger to the communist government. The government didn't take care to provide favorable conditions for reintegration of these people in their country; all attention was on their political activity.

Reintegration in Albanian society of the time meant that the repatriated person had to convince the security authorities that he did not constitute a political risk for the Albanian state. For this reason he had to be honest in the information he gave to the authorities. In some cases, repatriates were recruited by state security to be used for their own purposes¹⁹.

In general, the family's biography is described in reports kept for repatriates, where were given data about their family's activity during the period of kingdom,

¹⁷ File no. (508) 183, year 1954. Materials and forms in charge of former fugitive, now repatriated D. H.

¹⁸ File no. (167) 263, year 1957. Report on the repatriate from Belgium N.B.

¹⁹ File no. (167) 263, year 1957. Report on the repatriate from Belgium N.B.

during the war and after it. Here was also included the repatriate's activity. All reports were closed with the definition about repatriate, if he is dangerous or not. The family's good behavior gave the repatriate the opportunity to integrate by working in his homeland. In the best cases they were provided some good conditions. J. Gj was the brother of a high communist functionary. In the report elaborated by the security agencies, he is seen as "ours" and is asked to find a job²⁰. J. Gj lost these privileges when by decision no. 11, the Supreme Court sentenced his brother for "treason against the motherland, sabotage and propaganda agitation against the people's power", with 20 years in prison, confiscation of property, removal of all titles and decorations he held and loss of electoral rights for 5 years. He did not only lose the support of the government, but he was also imprisoned²¹. This case, as well as others, shows that when the family had problems with the regime, the repatriate was viewed with suspicion and often were considered as an enemy.

For most repatriates it was not the same behavior and kindness. There was no concern about their employment. Even insulting epithets were often used against them, such as *dotard, does not speak fluently, has low education, is a simple worker*, etc.²². Based on the reports of state security officers we understand that there was no interest in returnees' housing, employment or other activities. Documents simply records their work or requests they had.

The return to Albania also had the difficulties of the time when this phenomenon occurred. Most of the repatriates, especially the elderly, were not a problem for security officers, but the rest, as we have pointed out, were carefully observed by the state security officers. In Albania, after the establishment of communism, with the passing of years, class struggle became more severe. Subsequently, a part of the repatriates suffered the violence of class struggle. From the results of our research, there are at least 10 people who were imprisoned and interned in communist prisons and camps. At least one of these people died in prison²³. Even the repatriates did not escape the drama of the entire Albanian society of those years. In many cases they were interrogated, with the suspicion

²⁰ File no. (201), year 1957. Report on the repatriate from Dardha, Korçë district, J. Gj.

²¹ See the website of the Kujto.al foundation, <<https://kujto.al/>>.

²² File no (171) 267, year 1957. Reports on repatriates from Australia, pp 3, 5, 9.

²³ A comparison was made of the data obtained from the documents of the Archive of the Ministry of the Interior with the website of the Kujto.al foundation.

that they were sent from the enemy to overthrow the communist government. This indicated the insecurity of communist power and in those cases communist regimes choose terror. Class warfare was the order of the day.

5. Conclusions

The establishment of communism in Albania had great consequences for the lives of Albanians. A regime was forcibly installed in the country and the rights and freedoms of Albanians were limited. Free movement was banned both inside and outside the country. Emigration was cut off, separating Albanians from Western European culture and ideology.

What remains painful even today is the fact that none of those who ran the country for fifty years, did not asked for any public apology. Today's trend is even more frightening, where institutions have been created to bring to attention, not only the crimes committed in the name of power as the most terrible, but also the discomfort of people in complete isolation. Institutions that give partial truths about the period of the communist system, making the situation even more complicated. A nation that forgets is destined to repeat history.

In the ordeal of the sufferings of the regime, those who lived their lives under a strong psychological pressure were undoubtedly the repatriates, most of whom returned to their homeland with an indisputable feeling for the country and relatives, a feeling which turned back living only in fear. Totally justified fear, as they remained exposed all the time to the surveillance and suspicions of the system, turning their life into an unlived life.

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7. Curriculum vitae

Dr. Orjon Ago is a lecturer at Fan S. Noli University, for 14 years of experience in teaching history subjects. He is author of many scientific articles published in international journals and has participated in international conferences. He has been part of some national projects and member of European funding based projects that aimed capacity building and transformations in higher education.

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Bracing against the tide: the final stand of the Albanian Labour Party to uphold communism

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Abstract

In the late 1980s, democratic movements overthrew the communist regimes in Central Eastern Europe. The Albanian Communists attributed the demise of communism to ideological deviations from the core principles of Marxism-Leninism. Convinced of Albania's immunity to these transformative currents, they maintained a belief in the country's capability to persevere in its socialist construction.

This scholarly inquiry adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to elucidate the Albanian Labor Party's desperate attempts to preserve the communist regime. Employing a historical methodology, it leverages primary sources and scholarly research.

Keywords:

Communist dictatorship; Albania; 1990; Reforms; Anti-communist movement.

Riassunto

I movimenti per la democratizzazione verso la fine degli anni '80 nell'Europa centro-orientale hanno reso possibile far cadere le dittature comuniste. I comunisti in Albania credevano che l'Albania non sarebbe stata toccata da questa ondata di cambiamenti e che il paese avrebbe potuto continuare a costruire il socialismo.

In questo studio descrittivo-analitico, si presenterà una riflessione sui tentativi dei comunisti albanesi per salvare il comunismo. Attraverso metodi della ricerca storica, si farà chiarezza sugli eventi accaduti nel 1990 in Albania, con interesse particolare sulle decisioni del Partito del Lavoro Albanese e il movimento popolare.

Parole chiave:

Comunismo; Albania; 1990; Riforma; Movimento democratico.

1. Background. - 2. State reforms and popular revolt during 1990. - 3. Reflections on the overthrow of the communist dictatorship in Albania. - 4. Conclusion. - 5. Bibliography. - 6. Curriculum vitae.

1. Background

At the end of the Second World War, the nations of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, with the exclusions of Greece, Yugoslavia, and Albania, were liberated

with the support of the Soviet military forces. Subsequent to the conflict, these states, Greece exempted, transitioned into satellites of the Soviet Union, and political frameworks identified as “people’s democracies” were instituted. Throughout the initial decade post-conflict, the political trajectories of these nations exhibited considerable uniformity and temporal alignment. In the initial phase, Eastern Europe witnessed the establishment of coalition governments inclusive of all factions barring the fascist elements. The ascendancy of communists within these administrations was augmented, a development facilitated by the Soviet military presence.

Distinct from this paradigm were Yugoslavia and Albania, where the communists ascended to governance devoid of external aid. In these territories, the communists’ acclaim had surged during the conflict. Their resistance against the adversary garnered the populace’s empathy, positioning them as patriotic entities. In both Yugoslavia and Albania, the democratic entities of the pre-war era were either enfeebled or non-existent, rendering the formation of coalition governments redundant, and thus authority was initially consigned to the communists.

Nevertheless, during this period, communists remained a numerical minority. Aware of their lack of popular support, the communists collaborated with other forces and endeavored to assert control over the secret police, military, and press. They were aware that consolidating their power was an imperative initial step. The recourse to violence and repression became inevitable, as communists acknowledged the absence of popular backing for a democratic acquisition of power. Resistance to the communists was minimal, owing to either the lack of opposition.

In Albania, the communists ascended to power by capitalizing on the significant economic and social backwardness of the Albanian populace at the conclusion of the Second World War. From the early years of their reign until the communist regime’s demise, the communist elite engaged in political purges, eliminating all political adversaries. By the 1970s, this conflict had morphed into a battle amongst communists themselves. High-ranking officials of the communist state, members of the Central Committee, the Political Bureau, the government, the military, were accused of plotting against the state or being foreign agents, and were subsequently imprisoned or executed. Accompanied by a pervasive fear of enemies, perceived to lurk everywhere, Enver Hoxha did not spare even his closest collaborators, such as Koçi Xoxe, Sejfulla Malëshova, Fadil Paçrami, Todi Lubonja,

Agim Mero, Beqir Balluku, Petrit Dume, Hilo Gjoka, Koço Theodhosi, Kiço Ngjela*, among others.

In Albania, the political monopoly of the Albanian Labor Party (ALP) was established, led by its “Shakespearean tyrant”, Enver Hoxha (Lory, 2007, p. 141). “This political dominance within his Party is fundamental. (...) It justifies the purges about which we know so much in terms of pain, blood, humiliation, and death. From 1945 to 1985, the purges would rhythmically mark this ‘political stability’” (Jandot, 1995, p. 142). This was also sanctioned in the Constitution of 1976. The 1976 Constitution enshrined the communist character of the Albanian constitutional order and the class nature of the state as a dictatorship of the proletariat, as Article 2 declared that “The PSRA is a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat”, affirmed the role of the ALP as the sole political force of the country, and further strengthened its dictate. The Constitution sanctioned Marxism-Leninism as the prevailing ideology in the People's Socialist Republic of Albania (PSRA) (Articles 3 and 15) and defined, as one of the basic principles of the Albanian constitutional order, the class struggle (Article 4) and the building of a socialist society with its own forces (Article 14), prohibited private property (Article 16), declared the prohibition of receiving aid and loans from abroad (Article 28), prohibited the freedom of religion, etc. The 1976 Constitution did not recognize the principle of the separation of powers, but that of the unity of power. Article 66 stipulated that “The People’s Assembly is the highest state power authority, the holder of the sovereignty of the people and the state, and the sole legislative body”. It must be emphasized that the role of the highest representative body was entirely formal, as this body was merely a cover behind which stood the state party, omnipotent and subject to no control. Based on the formal principle of the supremacy of the People’s Assembly, the latter elected, appointed, and dismissed the Presidium of the People’s Assembly, the Council of Ministers, the High Court, the General Prosecutor, and his deputies; all these bodies were accountable to the People’s Assembly and reported to it. It should also be noted that the 1976 Constitution removed the principle of the deputy's immunity for opinions expressed and votes cast in the People’s Assembly, which, at least formally, existed in the Constitution of 1946 (Law No. 5506, dated 28.12.1976).

* All of the aforementioned individuals were leaders of the communist state of Albania. They held high-ranking positions within the state administration, government, or Communist Party.

The pillars that upheld power in society were characterized by psychological violence and widespread human rights abuses of alarming magnitude. In this so-called society of “equal rights”, unimaginable injustices occurred. The expression of personal opinion or criticism of the government was fraught with danger. Anti-communist sentiments or critical spirit towards communism, even if expressed within a small friendly group, could lead to capital punishment. The state intensified repression within the country, and party control extended into all areas of life. All means of information and communication were strictly controlled by the Party. Manipulation of the masses was a common practice of all dictatorships, and the Albanian dictatorship was no exception. French researcher Gabriel Jandot describes this aspect of the policy of the Albanian communist leader as follows:

Enver Hoxha managed to wonderfully soothe the masses. The Albanian mass, stripped of dreams as a result of many years of apathetic submission, disintegrated by the isolation of each in their own living space, awaited, without knowing who it would be, the one who would unite them. To succeed was to first propose to them, forcefully and then very quickly by enchantment, a set of concepts that seemed simple to achieve but above all responded to what they were waiting for. (...) the promise of a bright future was the continuation of the origin of the eternal myth of an ideal society, but the implementation was this society prison and suffocating, this control of body and mind. (...) national Marxism presented happiness as an objective, in fact, in reality, it was the antipode of a Utopia, a hell (Jandot, 1995, p. 288).

In Albania, a fierce dictatorial system was constructed, underpinned by extreme political and economic centralization. Economic centralization, predicated on state planning of the economy, unequivocally prohibited any form of private ownership, whether in rural or urban areas. Competition was outlawed and branded as bourgeois and imperialist tendencies. Foreign investments and the procurement of external loans were forbidden under the 1976 Constitution. Additionally, the communist regime prioritized heavy industry, neglecting the development of infrastructure and the communications network, which impeded the country's economic recovery. Albania had not undertaken any significant economic and political reforms that could have revitalized the economy, such as decentralization of decision-making, enhancing the market's role, or democratizing the country. The policy of detailed centralized planning was pursued. In agriculture, the Soviet model of land collectivization into agricultural cooperatives and state farms was implemented, and individual gardens were completely banned. By 1989, 76% of

agricultural land was organized into agricultural cooperatives and 24% into state farms (Civici, 2014, p. 186). The Albanian economy showed signs of growth until the 1970s. This growth was partly due to external aid (Yugoslavia in 1945-48, Russia until the 1960s, China until 1978), while in the 1980s, the policy of relying on domestic forces and the country's complete isolation led to a significant deterioration of the economy, worsening of the balance of payments, depletion of foreign currency reserves, and scarcity of consumer goods. The communist state pursued a policy aimed at minimizing social differentiation. This was achieved through nearly equal wages, the requirement for intellectuals to work in production for certain periods, prohibition of private ownership, etc.

During the communist dictatorship, Albanian society was isolated from the rest of the world. Albanians were not permitted to travel to other countries. Crossing the border was illegal and even punishable by law. Emigration was prohibited, while migration was state-controlled.

This policy of curbing mobility intended to create a very stable and manageable society. Society was designed by its elites as a well-functioning social apparatus with all its parts fulfilling their particular purposes for the sake of the whole nation. Historical processes were interpreted in a teleological manner governed by dialectical rules which enabled the linking of the past with the present and the future in a well-designed and generally intelligible framework. Enver Hoxha's anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism was loaded with strong nationalism - according to (Pichler, 2014, p. 4).

Albania was a member of the United Nations (since 1955), but had not participated in its meetings since the 1970s. Albania was the only European country that did not sign the Helsinki Accords, thereby not participating in the OSCE. It maintained diplomatic relations with several European countries and had signed numerous agreements with countries in Asia and Africa, yet economic, political, and cultural exchanges with these nations were minimal. Enver Hoxha's fear of imperialist and revisionist enemies dictated his foreign policy. According to Misha Glenny, while this fear might have had historical justification, it was exaggerated (Glenny, 2007, p. 561).

To justify their policy, the communists systematically cultivated an ethnocentric mindset. All non-Albanian cultures were deemed degenerate, decadent, and revisionist. These mindsets and practices damaged and hindered Albania's progress in culture, economy, and science, as they isolated it from European and

global developments. No achievements in science, technology, art, or culture could penetrate Albania. The reading of foreign literature was banned, entertainments were strictly controlled by the state, as they had to be immunized from “decadent”, “bourgeois”, and “revisionist” ideologies. Hoxha’s contempt for Western society and culture is vividly expressed in one of his speeches, which is notable not only for its content but also for its vocabulary: “We cannot allow our country to turn into an inn without doors, where pigs and ducks, those with and without trousers, bare-necked and hippies come to replace our people’s wonderful dances with their unrestrained orgies” (cit. Vickers, 2008, p. 314).

The daily life of Albanians was characterized by numerous restrictions, suffocating monotony, fatigue, stress, and chronic ennui, intrusions into private life. The limitations were not only on what were considered “bourgeois tendencies or manifestations” but also on items that had no connection with bourgeois inclinations, for example, until 1991, private cars were not permitted in Albania, and the populace traveled in old and decrepit buses, trains, bicycles, or carts. For more than three decades, religious faith was denied to Albanians. In 1967, Albania eradicated every sign of faith and became the world’s only atheist country. Enver Hoxha launched a widespread anti-religious campaign, branding religion as “opium” for society.

Within the framework of socialist reforms, a vigorous propaganda campaign was launched for the emancipation of women. Immediately post-war, the engagement of women in the workforce contributed to an increase in the labor force. Theoretically, women were equal to men, but in reality, “although they could no longer be seen as property of their husbands, they had now become property of the state”, according to Miranda Vickers (Vickers, 2008, p. 303). In the name of emancipation, women became soldiers, bricklayers, tractor drivers, performed military exercises, participated in actions, and voluntary work. This not only did not alleviate the woman’s burden but actually increased it. Women were required to work in production and industry and also bear the entire weight of caring for the home (living conditions and the lack of household appliances made this process more difficult) and raising children. The state’s population increase policy encouraged childbirth, and women were denied the right to pregnancy control, while abortion and contraception were illegal. Facing the state policy, “Albanian men accepted the new role of women in public life but continued to treat women as servants in domestic life” (Vickers, 2008, p. 304).

The model implemented by Albania over 45 years was predicated on the rigorous application of Marxist ideology and Stalinist practices. Due to the insistence on continuing the principle of self-reliance, the economy entered a phase of rapid decline. The agricultural sector faced even more challenging conditions. Peasants were unable to produce enough to sustain themselves, let alone supply the cities. The prohibition of private property, the absence of material incentives, and poor working conditions adversely affected the willingness to work, which was dramatically reflected in a significant decrease in labor productivity and frequent absenteeism. Strikes were prohibited, but workers expressed their dissatisfaction by widely stealing and misusing state property.

These developments and characteristics resembled those of other Eastern Bloc countries; however, unlike them, Albania allowed no element of liberalization; it remained faithful to Marxist-Leninist ideology until the end; no aspect of capitalism was permitted, and the country was completely isolated, not being part of any Bloc. The liberalizing movements of the 1950s and 1960s in Eastern Europe were not permitted by the ALP to take roots in Albania, while the “wind of change” of the late 1980s inevitably made its presence felt in Albania as well.

2. State Reforms and Popular Revolt during 1990

The appointment of Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985 marked a significant ideological transformation for the Soviets. The new leader’s reform program was predicated on two fundamental elements: Perestroika — restructuring, and Glasnost — political liberalization. Gorbachev’s “new thinking” advocated for peaceful coexistence, repudiating the class struggle; it re-evaluated Soviet foreign policy with a call for international cooperation; it initiated consecutive reductions in armed forces, moving away from the arms race; and it abandoned the Brezhnev Doctrine, which had justified Soviet intervention in Eastern Europe. Gorbachev’s principle of political freedom in the Eastern Bloc was perceived as “an invitation” to rebel against communist regimes. The peoples of Eastern Europe sensed that the Soviet Union, now on the verge of social and economic collapse, was no longer capable of brutally suppressing uprisings in its satellite states. Without Moscow’s support, the communist parties ruling these states could no longer repress their peoples’ desire for freedom.

Democratic forces in Central and Eastern Europe openly demanded democracy, garnering support among the populace and the international community, thereby

further undermining totalitarian regimes. Consequently, the regimes in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany fell one after the other, and, through a domino effect, all communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe collapsed. The singular case necessitating a violent uprising was Romania. According to Walter Laker, the revolutions of 1989, unlike previous anti-communist movements, were successful because the communist systems were burdened with a series of accumulated failures, communist leaders no longer possessed their former self-confidence, and the “echo effect” rendered revolutionary uprisings contagious (Laker, 2003, p. 444).

The fall of totalitarian regimes was a phenomenon of universal proportions. However, the leadership of the ALP perceived the collapse of the system in these countries as a consequence of their departure from Marxist doctrine and the socialist path, the implementation of anti-socialist policies, and hostile foreign pressure. It still harbored illusions that Albania could remain unaffected by this “wind of change” and that the country could continue to build socialism despite the difficulties it was facing. According to Elez Biberaj, “Despite being frightened by the democratic changes in other countries and by the growing opposition within, the old guard of the Party of Labor was determined not to make concessions or relinquish its monopoly on political power” (Biberaj, 2011, p. 72). Bernard Lory notes that Ceaușescu’s execution was a serious warning for Ramiz Alia; moreover, “the leadership team [of the ALP] tightly knit through a web of marital alliances within the Central Committee of the ALP and periodically purged of any potential contenders for high power, was beginning to age significantly” (Lory, 2007, p. 231), making changes inevitable. For Shinasi Rama, a change from the Enverist system seemed unavoidable, as external pressure to alter the political and economic system was overwhelmingly strong and insurmountable. The deep crisis had generated significant dissatisfaction, not only among the persecuted layers across two to three generations but also among the broader swathes of urban classes, now deeply proletarianized both economically and in terms of moral values (Rama, 2012, p. 75). In 1990, the so-called “‘workers’ state’ was unable to meet the basic needs of the working class, in whose name the communists claimed to govern. The economic decline was rapidly undermining the once omnipotent authority of the ALP” (Biberaj, 2011, p. 63). The rapid population growth and limited resources in Albania were further reasons why the communist regime could not survive.

During 1989-1990, there were attempts at demonstrations in several districts of the country. In January 1990, the city of Shkodra witnessed some anti-communist movements; on January 14th, approximately 100 men attempted to topple the statue of Stalin but were dispersed by the State Security. Several of the participants were imprisoned. These events were not reported in the press at the time. Starting from January 1990, the leadership of the ALP convened several special meetings to assess the political situation and deliberate on measures to mitigate the crisis engulfing the nation.

At the 9th Plenum of the Central Committee of the ALP in January 1990, a program of measures for the reformation of the political system was adopted. It included the restructuring of the ALP and its role within this system. During the meeting, Ramiz Alia declared that calls for pluralism at that time were detrimental to the country, as they could lead to the weakening of the people's unity. According to him, the introduction of a multiparty system would occur gradually, alongside the development of a democratic culture (Academy, 2009, p. 352). Within this context, several legislative initiatives were undertaken aiming the necessary changes and improvements in the field of legislation. Thus, by law, citizens were to be guaranteed legal protection with a lawyer, both in the investigative process and in the judicial one. Similarly, the institution of legal and judicial rehabilitation was to be implemented, as well as early and conditional release for certain categories of criminal offenses. It was also decided to establish the Ministry of Justice. Meanwhile, directives were issued to review and amend certain articles of the Penal Code, such as those prescribing penalties for religious activities, for agitation and propaganda, for internment, etc.

With difficulty, yet some economic taboos began to be dismantled, certainly without changing the core of the system: state ownership. The economy would remain centralized, but elements of decentralization and the use of mechanisms that stimulated production would be introduced. Economic enterprises would be granted more autonomy to use their revenues for investments in sectors they deemed necessary. Changes also affected the realm of private initiative. Citizens were permitted to construct houses with their own income, and the sale of some depreciated houses in the outskirts of cities was allowed. State agencies at the district level began to encourage agricultural cooperatives to sell their agricultural and livestock products at the urban markets at self-set prices. Additionally, the prices of some goods were liberalized.

Nevertheless, as Kissinger articulates, “it was too late to salvage the communists (...) liberalization proved incompatible with the communist system – communists could not transform themselves into democrats without ceasing to be communists” (Kissinger, 1999, p. 794). The measures taken towards liberalizing the country’s life were evaluated both domestically and internationally as too gradual, failing to meet the increasing pressure of the popular movement that demanded a swifter pace in the path of reforms. Meanwhile, the country’s political life grew increasingly tense day by day. In the city of Kavaja, in February, several youths wrote anti-communist slogans on a school building, and in March, cries of “Democracy – Democracy” rang out during a football match of the Kavaja football team. On March 26, the revolt escalated into a march by the citizens of Kavaja wielding anti-government slogans.

In response to these developments, another meeting of the Central Committee of the ALP took place in April 1990. The Plenum evaluated the measures taken for democratization and emphasized the need to accelerate and expand these measures across all spheres of economic, social, and political life. The Plenum paid particular attention to the economic problems and difficulties, which, according to the communists, were the principal causes of citizens’ unrest. The Plenum adopted several measures to improve the supply of goods to the population, especially in rural areas experiencing significant economic hardship. It was also decided to distribute livestock and return animals to cooperative families, reinstating the former system of private yards. This decision granted peasants the right to sell surplus produce from their yards in the market. The Plenum criticized the bureaucratic and centralizing methods in the organization and management of the economy and oriented towards a path of decentralization, expanding the competencies of enterprises in the area of planning and the use of financial resources, etc. (Academy, 2009, p. 354). However, the ALP had no intention of initiating reforms that would change the economic and political system but merely to reform it, to make its position more maneuverable under the new global conditions.

A significant departure from previous policy was the permission granted for the practice of religious beliefs. The announcement in May that the practice of faith and religious rites was no longer prohibited was met with skepticism; citizens feared reprisals from state institutions. It was not until November 4th that the first legal Catholic mass in 23 years was held in Shkodër by Dom Simon Jubani.

Simultaneously, institutions of other faiths, including Muslim and Orthodox, began to open and initiate religious activities.

In the diplomatic activity, the state undertook several steps aimed at liberalizing and intensifying relations with other countries. Albania participated in various activities designed to strengthen cooperation among Balkan countries, such as multiparty meetings, Balkan conferences, the Adriatic Initiative, the Mediterranean Initiative, etc. Steps were also taken in the field of international cooperation. For this purpose, production using materials specified by foreign firms, the purchase of machinery on deferred payment terms (a form of credit), and other measures were allowed. New forms of economic and financial cooperation began to be implemented with several countries, including the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, etc., within the framework of the International Organization for Assistance and Cooperation (OECD), such as the transfer of technology and equipment at no cost, construction of special projects with long-term repayment, etc. Ministers and institutions were authorized to conclude agreements of a scientific, cultural, and educational character with the ministries and analogous institutions of other countries (Academy, 2009, p. 353). In April 1990, President Ramiz Alia gave a speech that paved the way for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with the United States, Britain, the USSR, and the European Community. U.N. Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar visited Albania in May 1990.

The ideas developed during the Plenum were reflected in the “Law on Enterprises”, which was adopted by the People’s Assembly in May 1990. This law did not alter the socialist character of public property but introduced market economy elements into the functioning and activities of enterprises (Law no. 7373, dated May 8, 1990). Simultaneously, the People’s Assembly passed several laws that brought about significant changes in the organization of the Judiciary and the implementation of criminal policy. Thus, a law was enacted amending the Penal Code, which narrowed the scope for the death penalty. Article 55, prescribing penalties for the crime of agitation and propaganda against the state, also underwent modifications. The previous formulation of this article had allowed for subjective interpretations, which in practice had led to severe political and social consequences, on individuals were deemed enemies but de facto were not. The new formulation of the law also removed penalties for religious activities and beliefs. Concurrently, the decree on internment-exiles was abolished. Provisions addressing the illegal crossing of state borders were also revised. It was no longer

considered treason against the homeland but a violation of border regulations, consequently, the prescribed penalty was re-education through labor or deprivation of liberty for up to five years (Law no. 7380, dated 8.5.1990). In May 1990, "considering the needs posed by the country's development for deepening socialist democracy and further perfecting legislation and the system of state organs, as well as for the continuous strengthening of socialist legality" (Law no. 7381, dated May 9, 1990), the People's Assembly approved the Law on the establishment of the Ministry of Justice (which had been abolished for over two decades) and the Institute of Advocacy, as well as the draft law on issuing passports for foreign travel and granting visas, which addressed the issue of permitting citizens to exit and enter the territory of the PSRA. Alongside the aforementioned changes, the ALP endeavored to stimulate societal debate, creating a broader space for free speech and thought.

As the leadership of the ALP endeavored to deepen the process of reforms, certainly under its control, with the intent to mitigate the effects of the crisis and to refurbish its image, the economic and political situation deteriorated further. By mid-1990, the country plunged into total collapse. A significant decline in production was observed across major economic sectors. In the complex situation the country was navigating, work and production stoppages became commonplace, due to the lack of raw materials and the breakdown of discipline. To somewhat alleviate the workers' discontent, at the government's proposal, the Presidium of the People's Assembly was compelled to amend the Labour Code. The relevant provisions stipulated that, when production interruption occurred through no fault of the workers and the enterprise's administration did not provide alternative employment, the worker would receive 80% of their wage (Decree no. 7399, dated July 8, 1990). Characterizing this situation, Ramiz Alia acknowledged that the country was on the extreme brink of an emergency state (Academy, 2009, p. 356).

In early July 1990, several grave events occurred that further shook the communist regime: two massive protests in the city of Kavajë, which were violently dispersed by the security forces, and on July 2, 1990, in the late evening, hundreds of citizens attempted to forcefully enter a foreign embassy in Tirana. The intervention by the security forces led to clashes with them and an overt demonstration against the state. The protest was forcibly dissolved. Meanwhile, the wave of frustrated individuals seeking entry into the embassies swelled considerably, with citizens arriving from other regions of the country. According

to Abrahams, approximately 5,000 Albanians had filled the embassies; 3,199 individuals in the French embassy, 870 in the Italian embassy, about 500 in the French embassy (Abrahams, 2015, p. 67), the overwhelming majority of them (3,407 - 70%) were workers, only 155 were civil servants, and not a single well-known intellectual (Biberaj, 2011, p. 86).

The exodus of people was driven by economic motives, by poverty and misery, towards a dream of a better and more secure life. The political issue came after the economic one and in any case, most of the people who entered the embassies did not possess the cultural and intellectual level to be defined as political dissidents - expresses Brunilda Durici in her doctoral thesis (Durici, 2018, p. 93).

Yet "the attack on the embassies was a true popular uprising and the first real blow to the communist regime", assesses Prof. Aleks Luarasi (Luarasi, 1997, p. 5).

Confronted with this situation, the leadership of the ALP was compelled to execute personnel changes, replacing several of the older cadre within party and government organs to mollify public opinion. In continuation of efforts to ameliorate the dire state of the nation, Ramiz Alia organized a meeting on August 10th with representatives of the capital's citizens, followed by a meeting on August 13th with specialists on economic issues. Participants in these meetings generally expressed approval of the initiated reforms and emphasized the need for their acceleration. Concurrently, in foreign policy, several moves were undertaken aiming at opening the country to the world and establishing cooperative relations even with countries and states previously prohibited by the constitution. In late September 1990, Ramiz Alia, in his capacity as the Head of State, participated in the 45th session of the United Nations General Assembly. The rapid developments compelled the ALP leadership to convene a special meeting of the Central Committee in November 1990. Ramiz Alia critiqued the policies of rapid and extensive socializations, the implemented measures for restricting and dissolving the cooperative farm system with a reversion to public sectors of artisanal activities as erroneous. He acknowledged that the adoption of these measures was predominantly driven by "ideological motives, rather than economic factors". Among the grave errors, he identified the absolutization of the principle of "relying on our own forces", which had resulted in restrictions on international cooperation (Academy, 2009, p. 359).

On October 13th, 1990, the People's Assembly deliberated on Ramiz Alia's proposal for amendments and additions to the 1976 Constitution. In his address,

Alia emphasized the need for “new legal elections in our legislation and primarily in the existing constitution” in accordance with the “current stage of our socialist development” (Zëri i Popullit no. 272, November 14, 1990, p. 1). The principal aspects of the constitution that required alteration or enhancement, according to Ramiz Alia, included: (i) the separation of state activity from party activity; (ii) ensuring the supremacy of legislative over executive; (iii) strengthening the role of the People’s Assembly in legislative activity; (iv) securing the independence of state economic enterprises; (v) permitting the establishment of foreign economic and financial societies and institutions; (vi) revising constitutional norms related to justice; (vii) reevaluating the chapter on the rights and freedoms of citizens; (viii) reviewing articles addressing the stance on religion and religious institutions; (ix) adjustments and additions regarding the rights of national minorities, especially concerning their communication with the nations to which they belong. On the other hand, he highlighted aspects that should remain unchanged in the 1976 constitution, one of which was “the special role of the ALP in the liberation struggle and in the construction of the new life” (Zëri i Popullit no. 272, November 14, 1990, p. 1). That same day, the Assembly decided to create a Special Commission for constitutional review, chaired by Ramiz Alia himself.

The ALP permitted some changes to create the illusion of economic and legal reforms and the allowance of pluralism. The new Law “On the Elections for the People’s Assembly”, along with all amendments to the legislation during 1990, reflected the ALP’s new strategy to avert the impending revolution and to retain power. The new “Law on the Elections for the People’s Assembly” constituted a “facade of pluralism” (Luarasi, 1997, p. 5). According to Article 22 of the Law, each electoral zone was required to vote for at least two candidates. Article 23 stated that the ALP and other socio-political organizations legally defined had the right to nominate candidates (Law no. 7424, dated November 14, 1990). Such organizations did not exist at that time.

Social discontent reached its apex on December 8th, 1990, when the first student protest erupted in the Student City. The students demanded improvements in living conditions in dormitories, addressing several urgent issues, such as the lack of electricity and heating. Following the violent dispersal of the protest the next day, on December 9, several hundred enraged students protested on the main street and in the city square of “Student City”, chanting slogans like “Freedom”, “Democracy”. These demonstrations indicated that the movement was not merely for economic demands but also for political ones. On December 10th, students once

again gathered in the city square of “Student City”, joined by a significant number of Tirana University lecturers, citizens of Tirana, and other regions. The protest organizers declared 11 demands. At their core was the demand for the allowance of political pluralism in the country. Mujë Buçpapaj, a December '90 student, describes December 8th as “a night [that] divided history” (Gazeta Shqiptare, August 12, 2021).

Students sought a meeting with Ramiz Alia, who accepted their request. Ramiz Alia met with a representation of the University of Tirana students. During the meeting, Ramiz Alia indicated that the ALP was relinquishing its role as a state-party, and henceforth, it would be equal to other political entities that were to be established in the country. “The Student City rejoiced. The last communist party in Eastern Europe had surrendered” (Abrahams, 2015, p. 93). On December 12th, Ramiz Alia addressed the populace with a message, highlighting that the state had now officially recognized and sanctioned the allowance of political pluralism and the formation of opposition political parties, considering them significant contributors to ushering the country into a new phase of political and social relations. Among other things, he expressed,

The Party has now publicly articulated its view that it is in favor of the country's further democratization, the establishment of independent political organizations, (...) this prudent stance of the Party represents another significant link in our democratic process, which is now irreversible (Meksi, 2010, p. 75).

The speech continued with calls for restraint and dialogue to avoid, as he put it, “any mistake that could have consequences for the entire country” (Meksi, 2010, p. 76).

On December 12, an initiating commission composed of university students and lecturers announced the formation of the Albanian Democratic Party (DP), the first opposition party in the country. It included students, lecturers, intellectuals, and workers. According to Biberaj, “The DP did not have a clearly defined ideology apart from supporting democracy and took the form of a mass movement that included groups and individuals who, under normal circumstances, would not be in political alliance with one another” (Biberaj, 2011, p. 110). According to Afrim Krasniqi,

the founding list of the DP does not contain any former political prisoners, while it includes more than 30 members of the PLA, (...) If not anti-communists, then their

place would be taken by other groups, with a mixed political and social identity, primarily energetic youths, liberal intellectuals, but also communists dissatisfied with their position within the ALP (Krasniqi, 2014, p. 53).

In the DP program, approved at its founding meeting, it was envisaged: the realization of fundamental human rights, the drafting and implementation of democratic legislation to establish a parliamentary democracy, the strengthening of the rule of law, justice, and social equality, the emancipation of youth, women, and the peasantry, the full integration of Albania into Euro-Atlantic structures, the pursuit of good neighborly policies, deep economic reforms for restructuring towards a market economy, and fostering a pluralistic and tolerant dialogue (Meksi, 2010, pp. 89-93).

At the end of December, other significant events took place. On December 20, Nexhmije Hoxha (the widow of Enver Hoxha) resigned her post as head of the Democratic Front, a mass organization of the Labor Party; on December 21, workmen quietly removed a large bronze statue of Stalin from a central square in Tirana; on December 31, the draft constitution, prepared by the parliamentary commission, was published. It incorporated safeguards for many basic liberties, including freedom of religion, press, conscience and association, the presumption of innocence, and the right to travel abroad and to move about the country freely. The draft constitution was to be subject to public discussion, in the meantime, the limitations on basic rights contained in the existing constitution were increasingly ignored in practice. According to government figures, some 191 political prisoners were released in 1990 and another 202 were released in January 1991 (Human Rights Watch, 1991, p. 3). On January 4, 1991, the publication of the daily newspaper "Rilindja Demokratike", the organ of the DP, began. It was the first opposition newspaper in Albania and became the "voice" of many intellectuals and youths. Subsequently, other political parties were formed: the Republican Party, the Ecological Party, the Agrarian Party, the Party of National Unity, the Omonia Organization, as well as the Forum for the Defense of Human Rights.

Albania's transition from communism to democracy was all but smooth or seamless. The system change shook the country and was all-embracing leaving no Albanian unaffected. The demise of communism began later and turned out to be more disorderly than in other central and eastern European countries, - states Robert Pichler (Pichler, 2014, p. 3).

Thus fell the “last bastion of Stalinism” (Grimberg, 2005, p. 255), the “final domino” in the line of Eastern communist dictatorships (Gumeni, 2011, p. 97). The collapse of communist dictatorships in the USSR and Central and Eastern Europe “exposed Khrushchev’s boasts that communism would bury capitalism as unfounded” (Kissinger, 1999, p. 795).

3. Reflections on the Overthrow of the Communist Dictatorship in Albania

“Through the means the people of Central and Eastern Europe chose to seek democracy, there lies an existential choice; they know they are not merely choosing ‘a way of political organization’, but their very essence” (Feher - Heller, 1998, p. 183). Among scholars, there is debate whether the overthrows of communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe were “democratic revolutions”, meaning a change in sovereignty, or rather reforms, where the monopoly of power was not wrested from those who wielded it but was instead released by them peacefully, through a series of partially open and partially secret negotiations, which also determined the form of concessions. Jacques Rupnik argues that “democratic revolution” remains the most fitting definition, not because the revolution itself was democratic, but because its aim was to bring about democratic changes. He even compares the events of 1989-1990 in Central and Eastern Europe with the revolutions of 1848: “‘The Autumn of Nations’ in 1989 might best be likened to the ‘Springtime of Peoples’ of 1848, due to the rapidity of its effect, its spread throughout Europe, and the way it intertwined democracy and nationalism” (Rupnik, 2014, pp. 9-10). Regardless of the negotiated transfer of power between the old regime's moderate elites and dissident movements, the events which have been labeled as “velvet revolutions” or “re-revolutions” (Timothy Garton-Ash), or “negotiated revolutions” (George Lawson) are acknowledged for their revolutionary characteristics; their rapidity, the massive, powerful, and systematic transformation of society’s key institutions.

Among these debates, there are intermediary positions, such as that of the Hungarian scholar Janos Kish, who describes a “reform-revolution” dichotomy, an intermediate state that emerged as a consequence of what he terms the “inferiority complex” that revolutionaries imposed on reformers; or the viewpoint of Feher and Heller, according to whom these events are neither revolutions nor reforms; “1989 appears to be beyond both reform and revolution” (Feher - Heller, 1998, p. 173). Despite differing opinions, democracies in Central and Eastern Europe were

established, in Huntington's view, by "government and opposition leaders who together found the courage to defy the status quo (...) resisted provocations to violence (...) understanding that in politics, no one holds a monopoly on truth or virtue" (Huntington, 2011, p. 186). Conversely, Albanian analyst and publicist Daut Gumeni believes that neither government officials nor opposition should claim credit for the fall of communism, "communism aged [and fell] more from its own organic and incurable diseases" (Gumeni, 2011, p. 20).

In our view, the overthrow of the communist dictatorship in Albania resulted from the liberalizing reforms undertaken by the state and popular democratic movements, which were a necessity of the time and emerged and spread in the context of the weakening and decay of communist dictatorships in the Eastern Bloc, including Albania. These represented a peaceful transfer of power from the old communist elite to a new, reformist, and democratic political class.

After enduring severe repression and prolonged isolation, Albanians were experiencing freedom for the first time, at a moment when "most Albanians did not know what freedom was: they had instinctively 'deposited' it in the leader" – states Mentor Petrela (IShM, 2019, p. 41). "Free" Albania found itself in dire straits: a dysfunctional economy, a total loss of faith in the state, a traumatized society, and extreme poverty. As described by the lawyer Hekuran Hysa, the Albanian people emerged from communist dictatorship "impoverished, shattered, numbed, astonished, disoriented, and brutalized" (Hysa, 2011, p. 54). Fred Abrahams describes Albania in the early '90s as

gray and decaying (...) the poorest country compared to any other in Eastern Europe, with fewer telephones, unpaved roads, and people living on handouts (...) as if entering a forgotten world, a frozen space, isolated from the 'imperialist West' and the 'revisionist East', which had slipped everyone's mind (Abrahams, 2015, p. 17).

Foreigners visiting Albania during those years "were confronted with Dickensian squalor, senselessly vandalized and filthy – gigantic monuments to Hoxha's distorted vision", Misha Glenny writes (Glenny, 2007, p. 569). Prof. Valentina Duka describes the economic situation in Albania in 1990:

[Albania] seemed as if it had just emerged from a war. Practically everything needed to be built from scratch. (...) the Albanian economy, which was designed to be commanded, was left without command. Thus, while planning no longer existed and

the market had not yet been established, the Albanian economy was engulfed by chaos and anarchy (Duka, 2007, p. 370).

The Albanian economy was experiencing a complex crisis, characterized by a decline in gross social product and national income; a decrease in worker productivity; a significant budget deficit, in the balance of payments and currency; high inflation; a noticeable reduction in the availability of consumer goods; difficulties in monetary liquidity, and an increase in unemployment. However, Albanians were euphoric about their newfound freedom, feeling no nostalgia for the past, looking forward with a strong desire for profound reforms. As in every other former communist bloc country, "democracy was seen as synonymous with peace and economic growth, as a panacea for all social problems, as the only correct answer to a myriad of unrelated questions" (Krastev, 2014, p. 46).

4. Conclusion

The isolation from the external world, which resulted in a lack of information available to the populace; the absence of political dissidents, who were either executed or imprisoned in the early years of the establishment of the communist dictatorship; the man's 'othering' and construction of the so-called "new man" manipulated by communist propaganda, as well as the absence of any form of economic or political liberalism in Albania, contributed to the unorganized and delayed emergence of the anti-communist movement in comparison with other Central and Eastern European countries. This situation emboldened the Albanian communists to believe that they could maintain the status quo; control over the populace and the monopoly of power. They declared that Albania was neither East nor West, socialism in Albania was without problems, and communism in Eastern European countries had faltered due to a deviation from Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The Albanian Labor Party attempted to undertake reforms to alleviate popular discontent and extreme poverty that had engulfed the country. These reforms were extended into the economic domain, aiming at a form of liberalization but without touching the core of the communist system; in the political sphere, intending to separate the state from the party, yet without allowing political pluralism; in the legal aspect, by amending certain laws, codes, and the constitution, but without endangering the ALP's power; in the realm of human rights, yet freedom remained

restricted; in the diplomatic sphere by breaking out of isolation, but still without granting citizens the opportunity to travel outside Albania.

The reforms were not aimed at altering the political system but rather were intended to salvage communism, control changes, and curb the eruption of popular dissatisfaction. This is evidenced by the actions of state institutions: the Albanian press, controlled and censored by the state, did not reflect any of the events of early 1990 that expressed dissatisfaction with the regime; the State Security “suffocated” these movements in their embryonic stage without allowing them to spread; Ramiz Alia, in his speeches throughout 1990, declared that political pluralism was a harmful action because it would cause division among the population; constitutional changes were initiated, but they aimed to make “cosmetic” adjustments to the existing constitution to carve out necessary spaces for the ALP within the new reality.

However, the communists bore numerous mistakes and shortcomings; the communist political class had lost touch with the people, the economic crisis had deeply entrenched across the country, popular dissatisfaction and protests were escalating daily, international pressure was also mounting, and the effect of democratic movements in Eastern Europe inevitably impacted Albania. Communism could not be salvaged.

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6. Curriculum vitae

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Exploring the social dynamics of internment: An In-Depth qualitative analysis of human connections in totalitarian environments

Emanuela Ismaili - Edmond Dragoti

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Riassunto

Questo studio esplora la struttura sociale degli Stati dittatoriali, concentrandosi sugli internati nei campi di concentramento in Albania. Affronta l'impatto dei regimi totalitari sulle relazioni interpersonali, le sfide nel cercare assistenza esterna e l'importanza delle amicizie intra-campo. Nonostante le restrizioni, persiste il desiderio di amore e legami familiari. I gruppi di sopravvissuti offrono sostegno, ma l'isolamento è diffuso. La comprensione di tali effetti è cruciale per la guarigione e la resilienza delle comunità coinvolte.

Parole chiave

Stati Dittatoriali; Internamento; Impatto Psicologico; Relazioni Sociali; Gruppi di Sopravvissuti.

Abstract

This qualitative study examines the social dynamics within dictatorial states, focusing on the experiences of individuals interned in Albanian concentration camps. It highlights the challenges of seeking external assistance, the importance of intra-camp friendships, the pursuit of love and familial bonds, restricted communication, and the role of survivor groups. The findings underscore the profound impact of oppressive governance on human connections, revealing barriers to assistance, the resilience of interpersonal bonds within internment, and the isolating effects of restricted communication and control.

Key words

Concentration camps; Internment; Social relationships; Dehumanization; Isolation.

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1. Introduction

Background

Post-World War II Albania experienced profound transformations under Enver Hoxha's rule, which lasted until 1990. Hoxha's governance, characterized by strict adherence to communist ideologies, deeply influenced every facet of Albanian society. He imposed an isolationist policy, distancing Albania from both Western and Eastern blocs during the Cold War, exemplified by its withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact in 1968 (Biberaj, 1986). Hoxha's regime, deeply rooted in Stalinist principles, engaged in severe measures to suppress dissent, including political purges, mass arrests, and executions, profoundly impacting individuals across various societal strata (Vickers & Pettifer, 1997).

The internment experiences in concentration camps in Albania were marked by harsh conditions, forced labor, and strict ideological control. Political dissidents, intellectuals, and individuals perceived as threats to the regime were often targeted. The camps served as tools of political repression, where individuals were subjected to physical and psychological abuse. The internment camps played a role in suppressing dissent and eliminating perceived enemies, contributing to a climate of terror. One infamous camp was located in Tepelena, known for its brutal conditions and the internment of political prisoners. The internment experiences in these camps included overcrowded living conditions, inadequate nutrition, forced labor, and constant ideological indoctrination. The exact number of individuals interned and the conditions within these camps are often difficult to ascertain due to the secretive nature of the regime and the lack of comprehensive records. After the fall of communism in the early 1990s, Albania transitioned into a democratic state, and efforts were made to uncover and document the atrocities committed during the communist era.

The death of Enver Hoxha in 1985 marked the beginning of the regime's downfall. Subsequent economic hardships and escalating protests for political reform culminated in the cessation of communist rule by 1992 (Elbasani, 2013). The Hoxha era left an indelible mark on Albania, characterized by political oppression, economic stagnation, and social unrest, laying a complex groundwork for the nation's transition to democracy.

Changes in Familial Bonds

Internment in concentration camps during Hoxha's regime represents a particularly harrowing aspect of this period. These camps, as detailed in the works of scholars like Bernd Jürgen Fischer (1999), were not merely instruments of political control but also arenas where individuals endured immense physical and psychological suffering. Examination of historical documents and survivor testimonies has shed light on the draconian methods employed by the regime. The study of these internment camps is crucial for understanding and remembering the profound impact oppressive governments can have on their victims (Fischer, 1999).

The research by Johnson and Stevens (2018) provides an in-depth exploration of the effects of internment on family dynamics in Albania. Their work significantly contributes to the understanding of how internment can disrupt family cohesion, challenge the maintenance of a shared identity, and complicate the reintegration process post-release. This study illuminates the profound psychological impact of separation and the subsequent stress and anxiety experienced by family members, both during and after internment (Johnson & Stevens, 2018).

A particularly noteworthy aspect of Johnson and Stevens' research is the emphasis on the resilience and coping mechanisms developed by families. This resilience is not only crucial for navigating the immediate challenges of internment but also plays a pivotal role in long-term familial adaptation and strength (Johnson & Stevens, 2018).

Overall, the legacy of Hoxha's regime and its impact on family dynamics offer a complex and multifaceted field of study. This manuscript aims to delve deeper into these aspects, providing a comprehensive analysis of the socio-political and personal ramifications of this period in Albanian history.

Studies on Generational Impact on Families

Lang and Rosenfeld's seminal work in 2004 significantly advances our understanding of how trauma, specifically from internment experiences, is transmitted across generations. Their research delves into the nuances of family dynamics affected by the concentration camp experiences of parents. These dynamics manifest in altered communication patterns, familial roles, and overall family structure. A key observation in their work is how the ineffability of trauma affects familial communication, with many survivors struggling to articulate their

experiences, leading to silences or fragmented storytelling within families (Lang & Rosenfeld, 2004).

The generational transmission of trauma, as explored by Lang and Rosenfeld, is a complex process. It manifests in various psychological and emotional challenges among descendants, elucidating the persistent nature of historical trauma. Their work underscores the importance of understanding these intergenerational effects to fully comprehend the long-term impact of such traumatic experiences (Van Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2003).

Interestingly, Lang and Rosenfeld also highlight instances of resilience within these families. Despite the daunting challenge of trauma transmission, some families develop coping strategies that foster resilience. These include open familial dialogues about their traumatic past, therapeutic interventions, and concerted efforts to break cycles of silence and isolation (Danieli, 1998).

Fischer's 2016 study provides a pivotal exploration of the social dynamics within concentration camps. By analyzing historical records, Fischer unveils the adaptive strategies and formation of informal support networks among inmates, crucial for survival in the extreme conditions of the camps. His findings demonstrate the inmates' resourcefulness, such as barter systems and resource-sharing, highlighting their resilience in the face of adversity (Fischer, 2016).

A significant aspect of Fischer's research is the role of informal support networks, which provided emotional support and shared survival strategies, fostering a sense of community in a dehumanizing environment. This aspect of the research demonstrates the fundamental human need for connection, even under the most severe conditions (Browning, 1992).

Further expanding on coping strategies, Mitchell and Wong (2020) focus on the resilience shown in maintaining interpersonal relationships during internment. Their study emphasizes the role of social support and shared coping mechanisms. In parallel, Ramirez et al. (2018) explore creative outlets and communal activities as coping strategies, highlighting their positive impacts on mental well-being.

Studies on Survivor Networks and Solidarity

Niewyk (1998) and Gutman (1998) have significantly contributed to our understanding of the role played by survivor networks and solidarity post-internment. Their studies focus on how individuals, bonded by the shared trauma of concentration camps, formed supportive networks that offered emotional sustenance and a sense of community.

The formation of lasting bonds among survivors is a central theme in Niewyk and Gutman's research. These networks provided a unique understanding and empathy, often serving as a crucial emotional support system for individuals struggling with the aftermath of their traumatic experiences (Niewyk, 1998; Gutman, 1998). These studies also underscore the role of survivor networks in preserving cultural and communal identity. In the face of trauma, these networks served as a bulwark against the potential erasure of identity, ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage among survivors.

In summary, the reviewed literature underscores the impact of internment on individual and relational psychology. It highlights the complexities of familial bond changes, the intricacies of social dynamics within concentration camps, and various coping strategies. This comprehensive understanding contributes to historical discourse and contemporary discussions on trauma, resilience, and mental health.

2. Methods

To address the aim and objective of the research there were used the qualitative data collection approach through semi structured interviews of survivors' experiences from the labor camp in Savër Lushnjë, in Albania. The research team conducted 27 interviews (21 men and 6 women) designed to explore four main themes related to the survivors' experiences.

Less than 20 years of internment were experienced by only 2 of the interviewees, while 10 of the interviewees experienced internment for 20-30 years, and another 10 interviewees experienced internment for 31-40 years. Only 5 of the interviewees experienced internment for more than 40 years. Regarding the age of internment, 12 interviewees were born in the labor camps and experienced internment for less than 1 year. 11 interviewees were between the ages of 1-10 during their internment, and 4 interviewees were over 10 years old during internment. As for education pursued during internment, only 1 interviewee completed elementary education, while 9 interviewees completed 8-year education, and 17 interviewees completed middle school education. No interviewee pursued higher education during internment. Regarding pursuing of education after leaving the camps, only 5 interviewee's pursued education while 22 did not. Finally, in terms of the completed education level after leaving the camps, 1 interviewee completed elementary education, 9 completed 8-year

education, 12 completed middle school education, and 5 completed higher education.

The interview format was revised multiple times by the researchers, reviewed and approved by the Ethic Committee for Research, and adapted into Albanian to ensure cultural appropriateness and understanding for the survivors. Participants were contacted prior to the interviews and informed of the study's purpose, methodology, research questions, and expectations. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via Zoom and lasted on average more than two hours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed into Albanian, and a summary was provided in English. The transcripts were analyzed by coding and categorization, and the data were interpreted in light of the research objectives, using theoretical frameworks or concepts.

Overall, the use of a semi-structured interview format allowed the participants to share their experiences in a comfortable and natural way, resulting in rich and detailed information that provided insight into the experiences of survivors from the labor camp in Savër Lushnjë. The study's methodology and data collection process were designed to ensure the collection of reliable and comprehensive information from survivors.

3. Results

The interviewee's reflections provide profound insights into the multifaceted dimensions of life during internment.

Limited External Assistance during Internment

The harsh reality of receiving limited external assistance during internment paints a picture of isolation and vulnerability from the interviewer's perspective. The oppressive regime's strict surveillance and treatment created a formidable barrier, making external support a risky endeavor.

The constant monitoring and intrusive measures of the surveillance system posed significant challenges for individuals outside the internment to provide meaningful help. The restrictive environment not only confined the movements of those interned but also instilled widespread fear beyond the camp. People willing to offer assistance, aware of the potential risks they faced, found themselves caught

in a difficult situation, torn between doing what they believed was right and fearing the consequences. As one interviewee expressed:

Zero contact with us. They were afraid. They started coming in 1991. But since they started coming in '91, I didn't agree to be close. I tried to stay away from everyone".
"No, no, there wasn't. With those who were inside Albania, they were afraid to come and we were afraid to go. The contact had remained dead. There was no contact (...)

People outside the internment camps faced a tough choice - whether to help or protect themselves. Offering assistance could lead to being socially isolated or facing punishment from the authorities. The widespread fear created by the oppressive regime affected everyone, making it hard for outsiders to decide what to do.

The lack of external help wasn't just because of practical issues; it also showed how difficult it was for people outside the internment to help. The persons being interviewed talked about the challenge of wanting to help while also needing to stay safe. Helping those inside the internment could bring serious consequences, similar to the tough conditions within the camp.

Formation of Friendships within the Internment Community

The time in internment was a tough test that brought the community together, showing how important friendships were for comfort during hard times. For those who were interned, friendships became powerful sources of support, giving emotional help and a feeling of togetherness in the face of difficulties.

In the difficult and oppressive conditions of internment, where people dealt with both physical limitations and mental hardships, friendships became a source of strength. These connections went beyond the restrictions imposed by authorities, providing a sense of normalcy and humanity in an otherwise degrading environment. Friendships within the group of those interned became a way for everyone to help each other, making it easier to handle the challenges of being isolated and uncertain about the future. As one person being interviewed pointed out:

We had a kind of solidarity; we all suffered the same injustices, so, in that sense, we got along so well. It is truly exemplary how there were absolutely no complaints. I remember that we sometimes discussed, and even the adults considered the young girls as sisters because there were young girls that I said I was very young, but I

listened to those cousins who said that there was never any incident or anything immoral. It is surprising what solidarity was there in the internment camp, especially in the slum where we were forced to live inside a square there.

Of course, I said, the best food has been that familiarity with each other. Helping each other, solidarity with each other has been the main support, even in the formation of our character.

The isolation imposed by the regime's surveillance and persecution made the friendships formed within the interned community even more important. These internal bonds weren't just emotional support; they also became a way to resist the isolating tactics of the oppressive regime. The person being interviewed highlighted how these friendships had a deep impact, describing them as crucial threads weaving through the fabric of resilience, solidarity, and shared humanity within the internment experience.

Challenges and Resilience in Marriage Bonds during Internment

During internment, people actively sought companionship and formed marriage bonds as acts of resistance in a challenging environment. Despite facing adversity, those within the internment not only sought emotional connections but also committed to establishing marriages.

The pursuit of companionship and marriage in such circumstances reflects the unyielding human spirit's desire for normalcy and connection. Faced with oppressive conditions, people resisted the dehumanizing effects of internment by embracing the fundamental human need for love and companionship. Marriage, symbolizing commitment and shared resilience, became a tangible expression of defiance against the stifling environment.

(...) high school girls, for example, knew we were interned. Although they liked a boy or a girl, they were still afraid of the consequences. There were consequences. If you were to fall in love with an interned boy, there would be consequences if the family found out. So, in this respect too, you were deprived, you were deprived. While, among the girls of the camp, this does not happen with each other. A very rare phenomenon because we considered them to be part of a family (...).

One person's story illustrates the challenges faced during this pursuit. A threat from an operative made the interviewee reconsider his choices, emphasizing the difficulties individuals encountered in their pursuit of love and connection.

Despite such challenges, people persisted in their efforts to find companionship, showcasing the enduring nature of the human spirit.

Authorities, recognizing the potential threat posed by independent individuals, sometimes manipulated marriage as a means of control. Understanding that strong family units could harbor dissent, the regime strategically used marriage to exert influence and monitor those within the internment. Marriage, which could have been an act of personal agency and defiance, was at times forced into becoming a tool for the authorities to tighten their control on individuals and families.

The tension between the genuine pursuit of companionship and the authorities' manipulation of marriage adds complexity to the internment narrative. The interviewee's account reveals the resilience embedded in seeking connection, even as external forces tried to exploit this fundamental aspect of human experience for their own purposes. In the face of such challenges, marriage bonds within the internment emerged as both acts of personal defiance and arenas where the struggle for agency and autonomy played out against a backdrop of oppression.

I can tell this as the story of my life, that my first love of life was impossible and ended up being impossible. Because the girl was on the other side. One day, an operative comes to me, I was below the bridge fishing, he was above, and his shadow fell on me in the water where I was fishing. My blood froze because I said he came to deport me, to put me in prison. He told me what are you doing? I told him I was fishing. What fish? Chinese. He threatened me: "Who told you it's a Chinese fish? I told him: "People say that I don't... "He said: "How about love?" I said nothing, pretending I didn't know anything. "For your own good, let me tell you, find your category and let the girl go, I will be the one who will send you to prison for 10 if you don't let her go". All hope was cut off there and I had to find my category to marry". "Yes, human nature does not change. Man will rejoice, laugh, cry, in whatever environment he lives. It is within human nature, in those days we were very young, I got married at 21 years old, I became a father at 21 years old.families were created between each other..... Families were created under those conditions, they did their best to force you to get married, so that you would be more controlled, more secure, so that you would have a weight on your back, you would not have the opportunity, we are talking about leaving the country, they did their best to make it easy for you to get married, so that they could torture you more easily, to torture you more, being single, being independent, one is told not to be rude, and when you have a family, responsibilities increase. They knew this aspect well and did their best to create families, to create opportunities to torture them more".

Limited Contact with External People during Internment

The internment experience unfolded as a chapter marked by limited interaction with people outside, revealing a poignant tale of severed connections and the constant impact of danger and surveillance.

Communication with the outside world declined due to the ever-present threat of danger and the watchful eyes of the oppressive regime. The interviewees vividly describe the challenges in maintaining meaningful connections beyond the internment camp. Interpersonal relationships strained as external communication became a delicate balance between the desire to connect and the fear of consequences.

Even individuals outside who sympathized with those interned found themselves attentive in the web of fear created by the oppressive regime. The pervasive surveillance tactics turned every act of support or communication into a risky endeavor. As a result, the minimal support from external individuals reflected the delicate balancing act they had to perform between their empathetic feelings and the fear of reprisals.

This was with permission to say about the people outside; very few visited us because the fear was great, not for us but for them, that we had defined ours, the fear part was gone.

No, no, I haven't kept in touch with my friends, the place where I ran away...I'll say something: From the place I ran away from, I never say where I'm from. I never say where I'm from, because those people in that country have influenced to harm us. Maybe forced, yes...that's my impression.

The interviewee's story emphasizes the profound challenges in maintaining connections with the world beyond internment, where even sympathetic individuals faced the harsh realities of navigating a landscape filled with fear and uncertainty. The minimal external contact isn't just a logistical constraint but a testament to the far-reaching impact of oppressive forces, leaving a lasting mark on interpersonal relationships.

The interviewer's observation sheds light on a notable aspect of the dynamics between those who were interned and those who were not. Despite shared backgrounds, growing up together, attending school together, and engaging in common activities, a sense of animosity seemed to permeate from those not interned toward their counterparts.

The statement suggests that some individuals outside the internment, influenced by their parents' perspectives or party affiliations, exhibited unfriendly behavior towards their peers who experienced internment. The observation implies that there was a conscious effort by some not interned to create a divide, perhaps fueled by external narratives or political influences.

Interestingly, the interviewee points out that despite facing conflict and adversity, those who were interned did not harbor any hatred toward their counterparts. This sentiment reflects a contrasting resilience and maturity on the part of those who experienced internment, highlighting a divergence in attitudes and responses to challenging circumstances.

In examining this aspect, it becomes apparent that the effects of political ideologies and external influences extended beyond the confines of the internment experience, shaping interpersonal dynamics and attitudes even among individuals who shared common histories. The observation adds a layer of complexity to the broader societal impact of political events, emphasizing the importance of understanding the nuanced relationships between different segments of a community during challenging times.

Most of them, to be honest, were not well behaved. Despite the fact that we worked closely with each other. But they knew that the more they misbehaved with us, the more sympathy they gained from the party. Although we were the same age, grew up together, went to school together, played ball together, their parents fed them that hatred. While the conflict happened to us, we did not have any hatred for them.

Participation in Social and Cultural Activities during Internment

The internment experience unfolds as a story of exclusion, where individuals within the camp were forcibly removed from the vibrant fabric of societal activities. The pervasive control imposed by oppressive regimes acted as a stifling force, limiting the opportunity for legal participation and contributing to a sense of cultural detachment and exclusion.

From the interviewee's perspective, those interned were pushed to the sidelines of societal engagement. The absence of legal participation in social and cultural activities became a stark reality, underscoring how the oppressive regime aimed to control not just physical movements but also cultural and social interactions within the internment camp.

The interviewers share insights into the challenges faced during internment, emphasizing how the community creatively navigated restrictions to maintain some sense of normalcy. Despite limitations, private sports activities like ball games, chess, and dominoes provided moments of relief after work. However, organized activities, such as spartakiadas, were prohibited due to membership restrictions, adding another layer to the experiences of exclusion.

(...) During the summer holidays, boys from L (...) who worked there, girls from L (...), also from K(...), and from the cooperatives came. Even when the holidays came, we created... they did not behave badly and we were so close that some were surprised when I told them that I was interned. Always when they came, even when I got married, there were people who came and helped me with food like: cheese, meat, salami etc (...). This was the youth of those years '77-'80. They began to understand what the communist regime was and what freedom was"

We used to do private sports activities. After we finished work, we mostly played ball. Or a game of chess, dominoes, to get through dinner, so we could get dark and go home. And organized activities, such as the spartakiadas that took place at that time, did not allow us because they all had to be members of the front, members of the youth.

The interviewers also touches on the impact of cultural events like cinematographic films. Despite being able to attend public cinemas, the fear of ridicule or manipulation through propaganda films created a constant undercurrent of anxiety during these cultural experiences.

(...) when these cinematographic films came to be shown, the ones that were public cinemas, they couldn't stop us there because the whole community would enter. But I will always, always be under the pressure that someone is laughing at me from behind. I remember when it came out, Qazim Mullet's comedy (...) they came and showed how to discredit the Mulleti family, but what had Qazim Mullet been, he had not stained his hands with blood, he had not killed anyone, no. He was a prefect, he was subjected to the laws of that period, as we subjected you to the laws of today's politics, you will not accept that legal amendment, or political strategy presented by the event or the other. So, it was very serious, or when these films with saboteurs were shown, we were always afraid that they would laugh at us.

For those enduring internment, the vibrant array of societal activities, integral to cultural identity, became a distant reality. Exclusion from these activities not only created a void in daily lives but also fostered a profound sense of cultural

detachment. The absence of legal participation in societal activities, as depicted in the internment narrative, is not just a logistical constraint but a deliberate strategy of the oppressive regime to isolate and control. This exclusion becomes a poignant chapter in the internment story, contributing to the multifaceted impact of oppressive regimes on the social and cultural dimensions of individual experiences. Despite the challenging circumstances of internment, recreational activities, particularly sports like football, played a significant role in providing entertainment and a sense of purpose.

The mention of a talented team underscores the existence of diverse talents within the internment camp. It suggests that the community was not only resilient but also rich in various skills, extending beyond sports to areas like music. However, a poignant aspect emerges when the speaker notes that despite the abundance of talent in various fields, these activities were deprived and forbidden. The restriction was imposed due to biographical reasons, possibly referring to the political background or affiliations of individuals within the internment.

The interviews illustrated how even in the pursuit of joy and meaning through shared activities, external factors and restrictions imposed by authorities could limit the full expression of talent and potential. It underscores the ongoing impact of political circumstances on the daily lives and aspirations of those experiencing internment, highlighting the resilience and creativity of the community in finding outlets for expression and connection despite the limitations imposed upon them.

Look, one tries, as I said, to give meaning to life. We, especially when you are young, our entertainment was ball, football. We also had a very good team. There was some talents in S(...).t, the youth of the camp. There were talents, different talents, not only in football...but we couldn't dream of a career as they had a bad biography. We had talents in football, volleyball, table tennis, all kinds of sports, music. However, everything was deprived, forbidden. You could not go further because of the biography.

Limited Participation in Family Events during Internment

The internment narratives reveal a poignant path in the limited participation of individuals within the camp in family events. What might have initially been considered a basic human right gradually transformed into a diminishing privilege, portraying a stark picture of missed joys and shared sorrows.

The interviewer's account captures the changing nature of permission to participate in family events. Initially, there might have been some flexibility, an

acknowledgment of the human need for connection and shared moments. However, over time, this flexibility gave way to unyielding restrictions imposed by the oppressive regime. The privilege of participating in family events became increasingly restricted, creating a narrative of missed opportunities and collective experiences that were either diminished or altogether absent.

“If one of the persecuted died, all of us who were persecuted would join the funeral, but nobody from the neighborhood across the street would come. It’s not that they didn’t want to, but they were just as scared as we were. If someone from their side passed away, we couldn’t go, even though I really wanted to because the person who died was a communist and had love and respect in their soul. But I couldn’t go. (...) And let me share a story that sums it all up. The little son of someone from the neighborhood across the street had passed away, and they were buried in the shared cemetery in K(...). When they were burying him, his father saw the name on the grave next to his son’s. That person had also been persecuted. In front of everyone, the father said to his son, ‘Ah, the desert, I took a son close to whom they are putting you in.’ Meaning, even in death, we will still be separated. That’s the tragedy of it. It means that even there, when they die, we will be segregated”.

The interviewers emphasize the difficulties faced during funerals, where even expressing condolences became a delicate task due to the pervasive fear within the community. The evolving restrictions on participation in family events add to the overall theme of isolation within the internment experience. What might have started as a controlled limitation gradually intensified, heightening the sense of isolation felt by individuals in the internment camp.

The interviewers underscore the profound impact of these restrictions on the fabric of familial relationships, as the ability to take part in significant life events became a diminishing privilege. This echoes the broader theme of limited agency under oppressive regimes, where even family bonds are subject to the constraints of authority, contributing to a collective sense of isolation and loss.

The limited participation in family events not only highlights the personal toll on individuals within the internment camp but also serves as a small-scale representation of the broader societal impact of oppressive regimes. Even familial bonds are subject to the constraints of authority, adding to a shared sense of isolation and loss within the internment experience.

The interviews describe a clear boundary that existed between those who were interned and those who were not. There was a mutual desire to keep a distance,

both from the interned individuals and those outside the internment. This created a distinct separation, with neither group wanting to mix or engage with the other on a personal level.

Despite this mutual desire for separation, the interviewees affirmed that a form of friendship existed when it came to work. The necessity of working closely with each other facilitated a professional or task-oriented camaraderie. Engaging in sports activities like ball games, football, or volleyball also provided an avenue for interaction, but these interactions were limited to specific contexts.

However, the boundary remained intact when it came to home visits. The interviewees emphasize that even though there might have been shared activities in certain environments, the separation was maintained during personal visits to each other's homes.

“Look, no, we didn't want them to come to us. But even they did not want to fall to us. So, we had a boundary with each other. That friendship went to work, because we worked closely with each other. Some ball game, football or volleyball with each other, but that's it. Not for home visits, for home visits we were separated”.

This description reflects the complexities of social dynamics during challenging times, where external circumstances contribute to the creation of boundaries and limitations in interpersonal relationships. Despite the shared activities, the separation in personal spheres suggests a division that persisted even in moments of recreation and collaboration, underscoring the impact of external factors on community dynamics.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the narratives shared by individuals who experienced internment under oppressive regimes paint a nuanced picture of resilience, challenges, and the complex interplay of relationships within and outside the internment camp. The limitations on external assistance, the pivotal role of friendships, the pursuit of love and family bonds, the restricted participation in societal and familial events, and the delineation between those interned and those outside collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the human experience in such challenging circumstances.

The stories highlight the profound impact of political ideologies and oppressive regimes on shaping not only the physical but also the emotional and social landscapes. The boundaries and limitations imposed by authorities permeated various aspects of life, influencing not just individual actions but also the dynamics of friendships, family relationships, and community interactions.

Despite facing adversity, individuals within the internment exhibited resilience, finding creative ways to connect and seek meaning in shared activities such as sports and recreation. However, the persistent restrictions, even in these seemingly neutral spaces, underscore the extent to which external factors continued to shape and constrain interpersonal relationships.

The delineation between those interned and those outside, as described by the interviewers, further emphasizes the lasting impact of political circumstances on community dynamics. Even in shared activities and professional settings, a clear boundary existed, reflecting a mutual desire for separation that persisted even during moments of collaboration.

The challenges in providing external assistance during internment unveil the isolating effects of oppressive regimes. The dilemmas faced by external individuals underscore the moral quandaries experienced by those sympathetic to the plight of those interned (Johnson & Stevens, 2018).

Friendships within the internment community emerge as vital sources of support, countering the dehumanizing impact of oppressive conditions. The futile attempts to connect with external individuals emphasize the isolating impact of constant monitoring and persecution (Fischer, 2016).

The pursuit of companionship and marriage within the internment becomes an act of defiance against the oppressive environment (Lang & Rosenfeld, 2004). Authorities' occasional manipulation of marriage as a means of control adds complexity to the struggle for personal agency (Johnson & Stevens, 2018).

The narrative of limited external contact reflects the pervasive impact of constant danger and surveillance on interpersonal relationships (Fischer, 2016). The fear of repercussions faced by external individuals in providing support mirrors the broader atmosphere of intimidation.

Studies by Niewyk and Gutman illuminate the instrumental role of survivor networks in providing emotional support and preserving identity (Niewyk, 1998; Gutman, 1998). These networks become resilient threads weaving through the fabric of communal strength, countering the isolating tactics of the oppressive regime.

The exclusion from societal activities illustrates the far-reaching control exerted by oppressive regimes (Fischer, 2016). The diminishing privilege of participating in family events encapsulates the erosion of personal agency within the internment experience (Johnson & Stevens, 2018). The transition from initial flexibility to unyielding restrictions amplifies the overarching sense of isolation endured by individuals (Fischer, 2016).

In synthesizing these themes, it becomes evident that internment is not merely physical confinement but a complex interplay of psychological, emotional, and societal dynamics. The interviewee's narrative, combined with scholarly insights, provides a holistic understanding of the enduring impact of oppressive regimes on the intricate tapestry of human relationships and identity. The discussion underscores the imperative of acknowledging and addressing the profound consequences of internment on individuals and communities as they navigate the path toward healing and resilience.

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6. Curriculum vitae

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Edmond Dragoti; Rudina Rama: <https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page_id=359>.

Migena Butka; Eralda Zhilla: <https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page_id=1904>.

The Fascist internment system in Albania and Italy (1940-1943). First stages of research

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Riassunto

L'articolo analizzerà la prima fase della ricerca sull'occupazione italiana dell'Albania. L'obiettivo dello studio è quello di evidenziare alcuni aspetti dell'occupazione fascista del Paese: in particolare, la cooperazione esistente nel campo della repressione dei ribelli albanesi. Le fonti per la presente ricerca hanno incluso le collezioni archivistiche conservate dall'Archivio centrale dello Stato. In una seconda fase, verranno aggiunti, ove possibile, i documenti militari conservati presso l'Archivio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito a Roma, nonché i documenti dell'Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri. Particolare attenzione sarà data al sistema di internamento fascista nei territori del Regno d'Italia, in una fase particolare dell'esperienza bellica italiana e dell'occupazione del Regno d'Albania.

Parole chiave

Seconda guerra mondiale; Occupazione militare; Campi di internamento; Reti fasciste internazionali; Collaborazionismo; Repressione della Resistenza

Abstract

The article will analyze the first phase of research concerning the Italian occupation of Albania. The aim of the study is to highlight some aspects of the fascist occupation of the country: in particular, the cooperation existing in the field of repression of Albanian rebels. The sources for the present research included archival collections kept by the Archivio centrale dello Stato. In a second phase, military documents, kept at the Historical Archive of the Army General Staff in Rome, will be added, where possible, as well as papers from the Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Special attention will be given to the fascist internment system within the territories of the Kingdom of Italy, in a particular phase of the Italian wartime experience and the occupation of the Kingdom of Albania.

Keywords

World War II; Military occupation; Internment camps; International fascist networks; Collaborationism; Repression of Resistance

1. Introduction. - 2. Objectives and phases of the occupation and the Italian repressive system. - 3. Insight into Albanian civilian and military internment in Italy and initial findings. - 4. Bibliography. - 5. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction

This paper presents the methodology and initial results of research dedicated to certain aspects of the Italian occupation of Albania. The study aims to highlight characteristics of the fascist government of the country, describing the different phases experienced by the occupiers and the population. The research compares the experiences of Italian military and political personnel cohabiting with Albanian officials, from the perspectives of both the occupied and the occupier. Cooperation and collaboration between the two sides can be traced back to the Great War and the economic and military agreements of the late 1920s (Basciani, 2022, pp. 50-54. Fischer, 2002, pp. 43-45.), although the military occupation of 1939 and the subsequent conditions on the Greek front marked an initial and obvious discontinuity in relations between the two nations.

For diplomatic, political and economic reasons, Mussolini's government, encouraged by Ciano, chose to maintain an indigenous administration in the management of the territory. This administration was headed by an Albanian government and included 'duplicate' bodies and agencies in relation to the regime's structures¹. The system of provinces, headed by Albanian personnel on the directives of the Italian authorities, was maintained in a similar form. The decision to establish an Albanian 'collaborationist' government led, as we can anticipate, to a general complication in the management of some of the most serious issues related to the contemporary world conflict, such as rationing, the management and exploitation of the territorial resources of the occupied territories, the conscription of the population for military or labour purposes, the maintenance of public order, repression or agreements with resistance movements. The documents describe the weakness and lack of legitimacy of the Tirana government as obvious obstacles to the effective management of Albanian resources.

¹ This was the case of the Albanian Militia and the PNFA, the Albanian fascist party that maintained a peculiar cohabitation with the PNF federation in Tirana, cfr. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero degli Interni, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Ispettorato Generale di PS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 7, f. PNFA. (ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re a Tirana).

During the fascist occupation, the autonomy of certain local authorities also became a source of suspicion and doubt about the loyalty of the Albanian state structure. This suspicion became more pronounced during the occupation's critical phases.

In addition, Italian administration in Albania was marked by the complex of swindles, thefts and embezzlements of the so-called 'Ciano system', the set of bodies set up to administer the Albanian territory and dependent on the king's Lieutenants in the capital.

At a lower level, the set of sentences that affected the military serving in Albania and the workers of the 'mobilized' companies (*società mobilitate*) presents a negative image towards Italian military administration². In April 1939, this hybrid system of administration led to a series of conflicts between the Italian and Albanian authorities. It is worth noting that the Italian Public Security (*Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza*) documentation did not give much importance to the internal religious divisions within Albania. However, these divisions were discussed in some rare conversations between agencies, by other ministries than the Interior, and in particular the Foreign Office³. A selection of microfilm consisting of several hundred titles of journals, monographs, novels and plays dealing with Albanian culture and tradition is also available at the Central State Archives (*Archivio Centrale dello Stato*)⁴.

Here we focus on the control and internment system of the Mussolini regime between 1939 and 1943, the year in which, after Italy's surrender to the Anglo-American armies, the territories annexed or occupied by the Royal Army (*Regio Esercito*) came under the control of the Wehrmacht.

² The Tirana Territorial Military Court and the set of sentences for the years 1940-41 saw a majority (7/10) of Italian names among the defendants, often under arrest for charges of theft, embezzlement and fraud against the military administration, cfr. ACS, *Tribunali militari di guerra e territoriali, Seconda guerra mondiale, Albania (1939-1943), Sentenze (1941-43)*, bb. 1-3.

³ For a comprehensive examination of Albania's religious and cultural characteristics, see Morozzo della Rocca, 1990.

⁴ *Nuclei documentali in copia presso l'ACS, Allied Control Commission, Joint Allied Intelligence Agency, T/586-3, Albania.*

2. Objectives and phases of the occupation and the Italian repressive system

In the following, we will describe the different phases of the Italian occupation of Albania in the light of the fascist system of repression. Beginning in 1939, the Italian government aimed to establish cooperation with the local elites for propaganda purposes. This approach has been described as 'imperial' in more recent historiography⁵. The policy of establishing links with the Albanian elite was aimed primarily at exploiting local mineral resources, such as chromium, which would become essential to the Italian war industry, whereas the amount of Albanian oil extracted after 1939, despite the exaggerations of some pre-invasion technical studies, would prove to be totally insufficient for the war needs of the Kingdom of Italy (Fischer, 2002, p. 53)⁶. The establishment of an unsupported executive and the overriding monarchical institutional framework, dependent on the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, did not seem to hinder a first moment of development of the country; on the other hand, this expansive phase was paid for with the sacrifice of any political rights and the increasing marginalisation of the Albanian population from the highest levels of the national economy; we can assume that this phase ended both for military reasons, such as the defeats on the Greek front, and for decisions in the economic sphere. In the early stages of 1940, some poor choices in the monetary field led to an inflationary spiral that began to erode the relationship between the occupiers and the population. Prices almost doubled in just six months (a 77-80% increase in the cost of foodstuffs compared to 1938, in November 1939), led by the imposition of a poor exchange rate for the local currency system (Fischer, 2002, pp. 53ss).

During the following autumn, the Greek invasion and counter-offensive took place in the middle of Albanian territory, which led to the downfall of the imperial image of Fascist Italy. Following the failure of Mussolini's parallel war, an organized and growing resistance against fascist forces drew the attention of the Italian army, as documented in the war diaries. Between January and December 1941, officials from the Ministry of the Interior, the Carabinieri, and the SIM (military intelligence services) reported that they had imposed special surveillance

⁵ See the fundamental work of Rodogno, 2007 and the recent Basciani, 2022. Regarding studies on the Italian occupation of Albania, different historiographical indications come from Halimi, 2017 Available at <https://journals.openedition.org/diacronie/6211> and Trani, 2007.

⁶ On the questions related to the Italian war industry, see Rochat, 2005.

The Fascist internment system

measures on approximately 21,000 Albanians. Of these, 5,600 were interned in concentration camps or confined to special zones, which were modelled on the Fascist and Savoy surveillance and internment system. The material consequences of the failures of this administrative system will be evident in the entire occupation, which since the winter of 1941 has been marked by a series of sabotages, explosive and non-explosive attacks (such as the failed attempt on the life of Victor Emmanuel III in January 1941), assassinations and ambushes on soldiers and officials of the Kingdom of Italy⁷. The Albanian government's fragility may have undermined its credibility with the population, given the succession of vicious criminal acts of reprisal commanded by the Italians and Albanian military and paramilitary formations. This conduct became particularly notorious during the Kruja government, especially for the acts of reprisal against partisans and the population of the southern regions and the Ioannina area. From 1942 onwards, it became common practice to attribute responsibility for attacks to the community living within 1,500 meters of the site of the event, especially in the annexed territories following the German occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece.

It is worth noting that similar rules were imposed by the Wehrmacht on Italian civilians and partisans two years later. Anyone found with weapons, either in hand or at home, could be killed on the spot. The preference for internment was given to heads of families, including elderly ones, who lived at the sites of partisan attacks. The rules of internment pertained to political offences committed by the local population, such as armed insurrection, organization or participation in subversive groups and associations, and bomb attacks against the occupier's forces. Additionally, incitement to desert compulsory labour or military conscription was also considered a political offence. The 'ancillary' reprisal measures could affect the entire population of the area between the ages of 16 and 60, who were effectively held hostage in order to prevent further partisan attacks. In Albania, from the winter of 1941-42 onwards, the same radical regulations that had been approved in the territories of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia were imposed to an increasing extent in an attempt to deal with the resistance movement. According to different scholars, the 'Circular 3 C' of 1 March 1942, infamous for its provisions for the radical repression of rebels in the Balkans, was implemented in every context touched by the Italian occupation, except for southern France (Rodogno, 2003, pp. 416-434; Borgomaneri, 2006; Aga Rossi,

⁷ Rodogno, 2003, pp. 101-114, 202-208 and chart n. 51; Lory, 2016, pp. 380-390.

Giusti, 2011). The circular, issued by General Roatta, commander of the Second Army deployed in Slovenia and Dalmatia, became infamous for giving officers wide latitude on anti-partisan operations, often resulting in catastrophic consequences for entire communities. On 16 February 1943, General Renzo Dalmazzo, the superior commander of the armed forces in Albania, wrote to the command of the IX and XXV Army Corps in the Shkodra and Kosovo sectors. The regulations stated that “valid men arrested in the village centers of revolt must be kept available to be sent to concentration camps for possible subsequent reprisals” (Rodogno, 2003, pp. 183-185, 416-434).

A notable case of internment policy in the Balkans was that of Pirzio Biroli, commander of the armed forces in Montenegro, who was indicted after the war for war crimes in his area of command. In the summer of 1941, following the Montenegrin partisan insurrection, the general allowed his officers and soldiers to destroy the houses closest to the insurrection sites, deport every adult male in the community, and execute any suspected partisans on the spot. This policy resulted in thousands of Montenegrins being sent to Albanian concentration camps. The following year, the general acknowledged the negative consequences of this strategy, which proved to be totally ineffective against the rebellion. He then ordered the establishment of a review commission, consisting of both civil and military personnel, to review the case of each internee from 1941 and determine whether the punishment was justified.

As a result, 3,000 former internees were permitted to return to Montenegro from the Albanian camps. In contrast, between 3 and 5,000 Montenegrins, often suspected rebels and their families, remained within the borders of Albania. Additionally, 1,597 Albanian prisoners of war, who were interned after the invasion, were to be released by December 1942 according to agreements with the Albanian government⁸.

Starting in the summer of 1942, the number of Albanian internees increased due to the rise of resistance activity, which became more organised, and the subsequent radicalisation of Italian repression. There are at least four known internment camps for partisan fighters: Berat, Ghermani, Kavaje, and Shjiak. In addition, two internment locations have been identified: Shiroka in the northeastern regions and Berat, which temporarily housed 150 Jews, probably Montenegrins.

⁸ The data are reported in Capogreco, 2003 and 2019, pp. 229-231, Rodogno, 2003, chart n. 51; Conti, 2011, pp. 153-159.

The Fascist internment system

According to Capogreco, Rodogno, and Conti, an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 Albanian citizens were interned and guarded for 'political' reasons or to be included in 'work battalions' in 1942 and early 1943. It is worth noting that at least 5,000 of them were of non-Albanian ethnicity or origin. The Italian armed forces managed the known camps, led by the King's Lieutenancy, with the Royal Carabinieri's deployment and only partial cooperation from the local prefect. The political internment camps' superior management was carried out by the offices subordinate to Galeazzo Ciano's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Regarding the management of public order, the armed forces were increasingly numerous but less effective in countering guerrilla warfare between 1942 and 1943. They were accompanied by the Public Security Services of the Ministry of the Interior, which were in a competitive position with respect to the army services. Additionally, the Information Offices of the Militia, attached to the 9th Italian Army in Albania, had their own intelligence services (the UPI). The conflict between these centres of power, to which the Albanian administrative structure was added, became an increasingly damaging factor in maintaining control over the territory. The replacement of Jacomoni with Pariani and the initial agreements with some of the armed resistance movements resulted in a temporary truce during the winter of 1942-43 (Collotti, 1987, pp. 236-238). During the following spring and summer, there was a resurgence of the Italian anti-partisan struggle. The methods and strategies used were increasingly similar to the Reich's anti-rebel operations. This led to a response from the Albanian communist National liberation movement and, in part, from the nationalist 'Balli Kombëtar'. In July 1943, the Italian Royal Army committed war crimes in Albania, including the massacre of Mallakasha, named after the old district of Mallakaster. The fall of Mussolini and the disintegration of the army in the following September led to a partial but violent *redde rationem* with the Italians and the collaborationist authorities by the Albanian partisans; The subsequent German invasion forced the entire population to face the dramatic choice of collaborating with the new National-socialist masters or opposing them with arms (Fischer, 2004, pp. 146-148, Stramaccioni, 2018, p. 84).

A brief mention must be made of the Jewish question. In theory, the immigration and residence of members of Jewish communities in 'Greater Albania' (understood as the extension of the nation's borders after May 1941) was forbidden by order of Lieutenant General Jacomoni. It is worth noting that neither Italian nor Albanian officials were particularly strict in observing the rule, also because the Albanian Jewish population numbered only a few hundred members. The Public

Security documentation in Albania rarely mentions the Jewish population, and only does so after the partial annexation of Kosovo. Specifically, the Information Service of the Royal Army (SIM) reported dozens of Serbian citizens of the Jewish faith who crossed the borders of the areas occupied by the Wehrmacht in the Mitrovica region or came from the Romanian border to reach 'Italian Kosovo'.

The transit of Jewish refugees from Serbia and Romania through Kosovo, who travel to Albania with a simple identity card or travel document issued by our consular authorities in Serbia, is reported quite frequently. They generally head for Pristina, from where they go to other Albanian centres, justifying their journey with the need to reach their relatives there. Since these are undesirable elements removed from territories occupied by the Germans or fallen under the strictness of the Romanian racial law, it is suggested that the permits in question should be restricted in order to prevent the entry into Albania of unknown elements who might carry out activities contrary to our purposes⁹.

Some high-ranking Italian officers managed to prevent the deportation of several hundred people from Albanian and former Yugoslav territories, despite National Socialist pressure to hand over Balkan Jews. It is important to note that these officers did not have humanitarian intentions. The attitude expressed in this statement should be considered in the context of the competence conflict between the Axis authorities and the will of the Italian armed forces to defend their own role and sphere of influence in the territories beyond the Adriatic. In some instances, officers and commands worked closely together to capture and deport individuals, as was the case in Croatia and in areas of Bosnia under Italian control. With regards to camps dedicated to the internment of Jews, we have mentioned the camp of Berat, which housed 150 Jews from Cimmeria and Montenegro; Kruje and Kavaje and the camp of Pristina were also included, for a total of 500 Jews interned among the Kosovars or from the territories of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Scholars generally agree that the Albanian population provided limited collaboration in the denunciation and arrest of Jews, both within and outside the country's borders in 1939. After the conflict, an estimate indicated that fewer than 80 Jewish men and women in Kosovo died as a result of violence or internment (Lory, 2016, pp. 383-389). However, the internment strategy initially

⁹ Report 25 November 1941 of the Military Information Service (SIM) to the DGPS, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, Divisione Affari Generali e Riservati (DAGR), Massime, b. 74, f. "Albania" A/14.

implemented by Mussolini's forces could be exploited by the German armed forces and police in the phase following 8 September 1943, with devastating consequences for the Jewish population of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

3. Insight into Albanian civilian and military internment in Italy and initial findings

Prior to the attempted invasion of Greece, which marked a turning point in the Italian occupation of Albania, military intelligence and interior services addressed the issue of Albanian military personnel present within Italy's borders. The unification of the two kingdoms under Victor Emmanuel III created uncertainty regarding the management of Albanian subjects entering the metropolitan territory. Albanian military personnel were able to move freely between the Kingdom of Italy and Albania without the need for a declaration of residence or passport endorsement. This was due to the equal rights of military personnel. However, the border militia and port authority of the Apulian provinces regularly detained the Albanian officers themselves, causing delays. The Albanian personnel in Italy mostly cooperated directly with the Royal Army, and some officers settled within the peninsula to attend training courses during the initial phase of cooperation with the Zog government. After the occupation, the number of Albanian military personnel in Italy increased. Additionally, more students and lecturers from Albania came to study and collaborate at Italian universities within the metropolitan area. As the military situation on the Greek front worsened and Germany intervened following the change of government in Yugoslavia, conditions for the Italian personnel in occupied Albania took a radical turn for the worse. From the end of 1942, the freedom of movement between kingdoms for Albanian officers in Italy was restricted by the reintroduction of the visa requirement for passports and the obligation to declare place of residence on entry¹⁰.

Regarding Albanian political and military internees, the DGPS reports from the summer of 1941 revealed a growing instability in the region due to increased armed resistance activity. During this period, the first significant attacks against Albanian officials of the kingdom occurred, particularly outside major urban centres. In addition, during this time, the Italian police authorities implemented

¹⁰ Report 19 July 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, b. 7, f. 1 "Viaggi cittadini albanesi in Italia".

stricter controls over Albanian personnel both in Italy and abroad. The DGPS exposed the issue of visas for incoming and outgoing officers during this period, and there was also increased attention given to the internment system. In 1942, the Ministry of Interior liaison offices with the Lieutenancy in Tirana sent several reports regarding groups of ‘undesirables’ to be deported from Albania to internment camps or locations within the borders of the Kingdom of Italy. The DGPS was responsible for civil war internment within the national borders, unlike in Albania. Since 1942, Albanian officials have faced difficulties in selecting suitable locations and camps due to the instability of the occupied territories beyond the Adriatic.

Since 1942, Albanian officials have faced difficulties in selecting suitable locations and camps due to the instability of the occupied territories beyond the Adriatic. Since 1942, Albanian officials have faced difficulties in selecting suitable locations and camps due to the instability of the occupied territories beyond the Adriatic. Requests for expatriation from Tirana have become increasingly pressing and demanding. The Ministry of the Interior’s incomplete documentation only hints at the extent of the problem, without providing complete lists and figures on Albania. However, related events can provide a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by Italian officials and the Albanian population during that time. In April 1942, a significant number of ‘undesirable Kosovar intellectuals’ were selected due to their disloyalty or potential threat to public order in the area. Italy had control over most of the territories in present-day Kosovo, except for the region around Mitrovica, which was occupied by the Wehrmacht in Serbia. The deportation order affected 560, or 581¹¹, intellectuals, professors, journalists and students. They were to be confined to specific locations, with at least two hundred of them being sent to the island of Ponza (LT). Others were to be sent to internment camps in the central and southern provinces of the Italian peninsula. The groups of Kosovar intellectuals were transported in different convoys between Albania and the port of Brindisi, and the documentation on them was interrupted in May 1942, when all the deportees seemed to have arrived in Italy, and only the discussions on their distribution among the different camps and internment sites continued; in little more than two months, given the problems of counting the internees, the

¹¹ The discrepancy is repeated in a series of telegrams and reports exchanged between the Ministry of the Interior and individual prefectures in ACS, Min Int DGPS, DAGR, massime, b.110, f. 16, sf. “internamento sudditi albanesi”.

Public Security officials managed to complete the deportation of the Kosovar intellectuals.

From the summer of 1942, the DGPS began delaying or rejecting internment orders for even a few dozen individuals considered undesirable. This issue prompted the prefectures in Italy to prepare for the expansion of existing concentration camps and the opening of new internment sites. Italian prefectures frequently found themselves unable to fulfil the requests from the Lieutenancy in Tirana, which were often beyond their capacity¹². In one instance, Foreign Minister Ciano was inconvenienced to achieve a favourable outcome¹³.

In December, Ciano had already described the Albanian public order as uncontrollable.

I cannot refrain from pointing out to you that the public security situation in Albania (...) is such that it is recommended, at least for the time being, to remove those elements (...) that have become dangerous or particularly suspicious in political terms¹⁴.

The DGPS responded to Mussolini's son-in-law regarding the internment of 220 Albanian citizens in Italy, as requested in the letter.

Your Excellency,

I inform you that the availability of places in the concentration camps, as a result of the continuous influx of internees from the new provinces and occupied territories, is almost completely exhausted.

However, bearing in mind the special reasons given, I will make arrangements for the two hundred Albanian internees to be placed in the remaining vacant places¹⁵.

¹² Memo from the Ministry of the Interior dated 12 April 1943, reporting 10,666 internees in Italian camps, 8451 confined in supervised locations. Reference is made to the possibility of adding between 2,000 and 2,700 more places in the camps with the construction of new facilities by the summer of the same year, in ACS, Min Int DGPS, DAGR, maximum, b.110, f. 16. In ivi also the report of 11 April 1943 limiting the entry into the Ionian Islands to 20 new internees.

¹³ ACS, Min Int DGPS, DAGR, *massime*, b.110, f. 16.

¹⁴ Ciano wrote to the Police chief Senise on the 31st of December 1942, in ACS, Min Int DGPS, DAGR, *massime*, b.110, f. 16, sf. 'internamento sudditi albanesi'

¹⁵ DGPS reply to Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano, 7 January 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, *massime*, b. 110, f. 16, sf. "internamento Albanesi".

In the same month, 1597 Albanian military personnel who had been interned in Italy for some time were expected to return to their homeland and the borders of Albania. This likely resulted in the need for Public Security officials to find new accommodations for political and civilian internees in Italian camps after the military internment camps were emptied (Rodogno, pp. 416-419, chart n. 51). The increase in armed actions against the Italian army, Albanian armed militias, and religiously connoted communities in certain areas of the kingdom posed an inextricable problem for the occupiers and their system of repression and control of the territory (Morozzo della Rocca, 1990, pp. 104-106; Stramaccioni, 2018, p. 87). Significantly, from April '43, the DGPS invites its informers attached to the Tirana Lieutenancy to draw up lists of notable personalities, beys, Zoggist politicians, particularly those who had survived in their role after the Italian occupation, Albanian professors and intellectuals who were against Italy. The files related to individual Albanian personalities contain useful information, but do not provide precise details on the fate of dissidents who were considered a threat to the home front¹⁶. The cooperation and cohabitation between Italian and Albanian personnel became increasingly tense. The year 1943 began with a period of relative calm in the Royal Army's anti-rebel struggle. In January, the Albanian resistance appeared to have slowed down its action, possibly due to the harsh weather.

However, the truce was short-lived (Burgwyn, 2012, pp. 48-56). Starting in the spring, the Tirana territorial court began proving an increasing number of 'desertions in the presence of the enemy' cases. This term refers to the defection within the rebel groups of former Albanian soldiers serving in the Royal Army, in the Albanian fascist militia or in other units of the same armed forces. In the first few months of the year, 11 capital sentences were passed, out of a total of about 20 indicted persons, all of them fugitives¹⁷.

¹⁶ "Elenchi di personalità che per precedenti morali e politici sono da considerarsi nocive o pericolose" in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 8, f. 29.

¹⁷ In the sentences of the military court in Tirana, the desertion of Albanian elements employed in the arms of the two kingdoms led to a minimum penalty of 10 years of military imprisonment. On the other hand, 'desertion in the presence of the enemy' implies a change of camp in favour of the rebels. In this sense, the minimum sanction was 30 years military imprisonment or life imprisonment, but in the vast majority of cases (19:1 for 1943), the outcome of the trials was the 'death penalty by firing squad to

In March of the same year, General Pariani replaced Jacomoni as the king's Lieutenant due to accusations of incompetence stemming from the rebellious situation and widespread malfeasance in the management of economic entities operating in Albania. The decision may also be connected to Mussolini's wish to replace several ministerial and military leaders during a crucial phase of the European war. The process of changing personnel had already begun in January and would eventually result in Ciano's replacement as Foreign Minister the following month.

Pariani faced the initial phase of a widespread insurrection, which became particularly intense in the border regions with the former kingdom of Greece, Macedonia, and Kosovo, as well as on the border with Montenegro.

In April 1943, the Public Security offices attached to the Lieutenancy reported.

The need to remove from Albania, in one way or another, all the most dangerous elements - amounting to about a thousand - who, in the near future, we might see, with weapons in their hands, at the head of the rebellion preparing against us, became more and more urgent¹⁸.

During the spring that followed, Pariani attempted to drastically change the approach to handling the rebellion. This was done through a series of large-scale round-ups, which tragically culminated in the Mallakasha massacre of July 1943. As a result, dozens of villages were destroyed and hundreds of civilians and partisans were killed (Stramaccioni, 2018, p. 87).

Accompanied by rumours about the dramatic conditions for captured rebels, responsibility for which fell on the regular armed forces and some SIM officers (Conti, 2011, pp. 154-156), the tightening of repression created negative impressions among the population of the capital.

In May 1942, a group of communist rebels were executed in Tirana's square on Pariani's orders. The sentence was not issued by the ordinary territorial Courts mentioned above, but rather by the Special State Defence Court, following counter-guerrilla actions organised by the Lieutenant. On 15 May, six partisans were hanged in a central square in Tirana. The event had a depressing effect on the

the chest', see below. Judgments collected in ACS, Military war and territorial courts, Second World War, Albania (1939-1943), Judgments (1941-43), b. 7.

¹⁸ Communication from the DGPS to the Tirana Lieutenancy of 12 April 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, massime, b. 110, f. 16, sf. "Internamento di Albanesi".

citizens, particularly due to the young age of some of the rebels. After the macabre spectacle, teachers in Tirana decided to take their pupils out of the classrooms as a sign of mourning¹⁹. The hanging of a well-known Albanian resistance leader, Hysen Kabashi, was postponed for «reasons of public order» exactly two months later, on 15 July²⁰.

During the summer of 1943, reports emerged regarding the population's negative perception of the Italian occupier's apparatus and the credibility of the Italo-Albanian union. There were several attacks against government representatives, economic and administrative officials²¹, and members of the MFA who were associated with the Italian MVSN and the Fascist Party of Albania (PNFA)²². Additionally, news of the mass repatriation of the families of Italian officers stationed in Tirana and Scutari surfaced.

The repatriation of the families left a «bad impression» even «among Italy's best sympathizers»²³.

At the same time, a large number of information selected by the Italian agents in Albania described the military situation in the south of the country as uncontrollable, with ambushes and attacks on the Royal Army soldiers becoming increasingly serious. The feeling of the higher commands sent to Tirana was therefore that they were on the verge of a widespread and serious uprising on Albanian territory, which would lead to large-scale operations against the Italian army. The tragic food conditions in the region were regularly confirmed by DGPS

¹⁹ Report 14 June 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 5, f. 1.

²⁰ Report 31 July 1943, in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 5, f. 3; see the entire folder n. 6 in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 7.

²¹ Informants report several attacks against bank managers, employees of the Banco di Napoli and the offices of the National Bank of Albania, in *ivi*.

²² Report of 28 June 1943 on the arson attack against the PNFA headquarters in Tirana; the PNFA, due to «anti-national» infiltrations and the widespread malfeasance of its hierarchs within its local federal structure had been reformed in July 1943, pending an internal reorganisation which is generally dealt with in the documents of the same month, see reports of 6 July 1943 and 21 June 1943, signed by the federal Pizzirani, both in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b.7, f. 37.

²³ Report 7 July 1943 in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 5, f. 1.

The Fascist internment system

informants, who often pointed the finger at the illicit food exchange and resale systems and the entire Albanian rationing and food supply system²⁴. The attitudes of the Albanian rulers, their weak influence on the population and the accusations of double-dealing, often unspoken by Italian officials, participated in creating a widespread climate of suspicion in the kingdom's Lieutenantcy in Tirana and in the fascist military and police commands.

The urgency to relieve the Albanian military internment camps of the most dangerous presence became more and more pressing with the prospect of a generalised insurrection by nationalist and communist partisan bands. Awaiting the tragic days that would overwhelm the regime and the entire kingdom, an unstable and terrifying climate of expectation seemed to reign in Albania. Since May 1943, officials from the Ministry of the Interior had been insistently requesting information about the number of internees and residents in the provinces of the kingdom. The replies sent by the prefectures refer, in an almost total manner, to political internees, mostly communists, family members of rebels and spies; the lists also refer to Albanian residents in Italy not restricted to the camps, and seem to pay almost spasmodic attention to some categories, considered dangerous to the stability of the kingdom, such as students and university professors²⁵; in part, therefore, the desire to relieve the camps of elements considered dangerous led to limited results, both before and after the fall of the Fascist regime. In the period following Mussolini's arrest, a last remnant of information about the Albanian men and women living within the borders of the kingdom is finally presented by the papers of the DGPS, in its republican guise²⁶. The Albanians living in Italy, if not interned, could in fact have decided to enrol in the new National Republican Army or attempt to return to their homeland, by then partly occupied by the Wehrmacht and in the grip of post-Armistice instability²⁷. There is no further news on the matter, which, conversely, does not seem to have brought any improvement for the Social Republic's armed forces.

²⁴ Report 31 May 1944 in ACS, DGPS, DAGR, IGPS presso la Luogotenenza del re in Albania, b. 5, f. 4.

²⁵ See the lists kept in Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, b. 7, ff. 'Albanians resident in Italy' by province.

²⁶ Ministry of the Interior (RSI) report of 10 December 1943 in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, Massime, b. 74.

²⁷ Ministry of the Interior (RSI) report of 10 December 1943 in ACS, Min. Int. DGPS, DAGR, Massime, b. 74.

For all other internees, whether political or military, the chaos of the period after 8 September 1943 seems to keep more complete information hidden, due to archival destruction and documentary dispersion²⁸.

Only future research could shed clearer light on the fate of the Albanian internees in Italy and in the territory of the Kingdom of Albania. In conclusion, further research on collaborationism, or rather on the cooperation between Italian and Albanian authorities and populations during the first three years of the war, could shed a clearer light on the power relations that existed between occupied and occupiers during the world war, even in the eccentric cohabitation of the monarchical union between the kingdoms; furthermore, research should not incur any moral judgement on the concept of ‘collaborationism’, which is still partly tied to the legal definition that the Italian military penal code of war reserves for it. The hope is to be able to rely on a general reorganisation of the documents held by certain conservation institutions and the opening of hitherto inaccessible funds. The intention is to place studies on the Italian occupations of invaded territories in the historical context of the Nazi-Fascist domination of Europe, in an interpretation that has recently been initiated by a few, albeit competent, scholars.

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5. Curriculum vitae

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Justicia Criminal y Policía en el proceso de construcción del Estado Terrorista de la Argentina

Criminal Justice and Police in the Process of the Construction of the Estado Terrorista de la Argentina

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Abstract

State terrorism in Argentina began to take shape long before 24 march 1976 when the last military dictatorship initiated. Early stages of this process took place during the late 1950s and, mainly, during the 1960s. This article studies the role of police and criminal judges of the Buenos Aires Province in this preliminary stage during which State violence acquired a definite physiognomy.

The emergence of various formal and informal scenarios in which police violence took place contributed to reinforcing the impunity of the law enforcement agents in the exercise of extrajudicial violence. Criminal judges at that time favored this state of affairs, intervening very little and even permitting such actions.

Keywords

Judges; Police; Violence; State terrorism; Argentina.

Resumen

El Terrorismo de Estado en la Argentina comenzó mucho antes del 24 de marzo de 1976, cuando se inició la última dictadura militar en ese país. Las etapas tempranas de ese proceso tuvieron lugar durante la década de 1950 y, principalmente, durante los años sesenta. Este artículo estudia el rol de policías y jueces penales de la provincia de Buenos Aires durante aquellos momentos en los cuales la violencia estatal fue adquiriendo su fisonomía definitiva. El surgimiento de escenarios formales e informales en los cuales la violencia policial tuvo lugar, contribuyeron a reforzar la impunidad de los policías en el ejercicio de la violencia extrajudicial. Los jueces criminales en ese momento favorecieron dicho estado de cosas, interviniendo muy poco e incluso permitiendo tales acciones.

Palabras clave

Jueces; Policía; Violencia; Terrorismo de Estado; Argentina.

1. Introduction. -2. Forms of Police Violence. - 3. Police and criminal justice. - 4. Conclusion. - 5. Bibliography. - 6. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction

In the years following the end of the last bloody civil-military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983), and even today, new generations who did not live through it ask their elders: Did you not realize what was happening? Did you not know that you were living under a dictatorship that not only imprisoned and tortured people, but also eliminated them by making them “disappear”? (Águila, 2008)

The answers to these questions have a certain degree of complexity and variety. But beyond that, it is common to find people who say that, during those years, for them, life went by without major upheavals. The military presence on the streets and the sound of police sirens at night might indicate that they were under a dictatorship, but these same people say that they went to work and lived their lives «normally» every day. The truth is that many of these things had been going on for quite some time; had all this state violence become “naturalized”?

To contribute to a possible answer to this question, this article takes a historical approach. The most critical stage of State terrorism in Argentina began to take shape long before 1976 (Bohoslavsky - Franco, 2020, pp. 205-227). Its causes and the actors involved were manifold. Within this panorama, the following question, among others, is worth asking: What role did the police and judges play in this preliminary stage along the 1960s, during which State violence acquired a definite physiognomy? The province of Buenos Aires, Argentina's main population district, offers a scenario where this issue can be specifically studied.

From the mid-1950s onwards, the province of Buenos Aires witnessed an upsurge in police violence, visible in the media through reports of repressive actions against anti-Peronist groups until the coup d'état which overthrew Perón in September 1955, and against Peronist groups from that date onwards. Events such as the shootings of Peronist supporters in the Buenos Aires provincial town of José León Suarez in 1956, in which the provincial police took part and for which they were congratulated by the authorities, had a major impact. The proscription of Perón and the continued support of his followers in Argentina led to the persecution of Peronist activists by the police, with the explicit consent of criminal judges who did not investigate these events¹.

¹ On the political context of these years following the overthrow of Perón and the emergence of the Peronist resistance, see the book by Melon Pirro, 2009 and also Spinelli, 2005. A general overview of the entire period by Pontoriero, 2022.

From 1958 onwards, these police operations seemed to stop for a while, as part of the agreement with Perón in exile, which brought Arturo Frondizi to the Argentine presidency in May of that year. However, alongside this police violence as a form of political action, another form of violence emerged that was to have a significant increase and continuity under the political changes that took place in 1955 and 1958. This was police violence against ordinary people who, in certain cases, suspected of having participated in some crime, were arrested without the knowledge of any judicial authority, beaten and tortured at the police station, and then released without further ado. Adults, but also young people, were arrested in their own homes or on their way to and from work or just while they were chatting with friends on a street corner in their neighborhoods. Most of these cases took place in the districts surrounding the city of Buenos Aires².

2. Forms of Police Violence

While reports of police torture and harassment increased in early 1960 political violence began a new cycle of aggravation. On 12 March 1960, an attack destroyed the house of army Captain David Cabrera and killed his two-year-old daughter. The impact of the event again highlighted the fact that these attacks and sabotage had never completely ceased since the mid-1950s. President Frondizi then issued Decree 2628 of 13 March 1960 declaring a “State’s Internal Shock”, the *Conintes Plan*, which authorized military intervention in the repression of student protests, strikes and other individual or collective actions considered “dangerous”³. Among other provisions, the decree placed all police forces in the country under military jurisdiction (Ruffini, 2019, pp. 20-40).

² These “ordinary” actions of police violence prompted the police intelligence department to follow up on the issue. The files compiled on the matter are currently kept at the *Comisión Provincial por la Memoria* (Provincial Commission for Memory). La Plata. *Centro de Documentación y Archivo. Comisión Provincial por la Memoria*. (Henceforth CDA.CPM), File 10375, Books 1 & 2, and Files 13369, 13505, 13756, 13811, 12282 y 13664.

³ The *Plan Conintes* (Conmoción Interna del Estado = State’s Internal Shock) had been approved by President Frondizi at the beginning of his term, based on a similar measure adopted by Perón in the days before his overthrow. This new 1960 decree did not, therefore, create the Plan but put it back into operation.

While this decision opened the door to a new wave of mass arrests of activists, politicians, trade unionists, students and others, it also endorsed previous forms of violence and police brutality against the general population. On the last day of her life, the young Esther Lily Ter Gate went for a ride in her boyfriend's van along the riverside area of the Quilmes district, a few kilometers from the city of Buenos Aires. At around 11 p.m. on that Saturday they noticed a car following them and as they thought they were being tracked by thieves they decided to drive away. Followed by that car, they accelerated their speed until a series of shots were fired from the vehicle, which caused her immediate death. Then, Esther's boyfriend realized (and declared) that the shooters turned out to be four undercover policemen from the Quilmes police station, who had supposedly opened fire because of Esther and her boyfriend's 'suspicious' attitude⁴.

While the press reported on all these episodes police intelligence followed up on these news and informed superiors, for example, about "alleged arbitrariness [of the police] that only exists in the mind of the article writer"⁵. Newspaper reports on these events did not always serve the same purpose. Some reported the events that highlighted these brutal procedures carried out by the police. However, other newspapers did not object to the irregularity of these actions but to their generalization.

Thus, for example, *El Atlántico* of the city of Mar del Plata editorialized that the *razzias* (police raids) no longer made distinctions as to who should be detained, and arrested "those who carried weapons, prostitutes, professionals, the least, the lady who happened not to have her documents (...) and so on, side by side, as if they were all cut by the same scissors"⁶. Similarly, several newspapers complained that, since the implementation of the Conintes Plan, numerous police officers had been regrouped to take part in military operations of political repression, which had left many police stations without "personnel" for ordinary tasks⁷.

⁴ This crime occurred in February 1960 and was reported to the *Comisión Investigadora de Apremios Ilegales y Tortura en el ámbito de la Cámara de Diputados* (Investigative Commission on Torture and Illegal Imprisonment of the Chamber of Deputies) on 21 March of the same year. CDA.CPM. File 10375, page 136.

⁵ CDA.CPM. File 10375, page 121.

⁶ *El Atlántico*, 6 March 1960. CDA.CPM. File 10375, page 122.

⁷ Report from the Bahía Blanca intelligence delegation to the director of the central intelligence office of the Buenos Aires province police. 2 July 1960. CDA.CPM. File 10375, page 67.

The new wave of military arrests for political reasons following the application of the Conintes Plan, which lasted until August 1961, not only led to the reorganization of the police forces involved in these operations, but also opened a breach in the management of the police force. During the whole time the Plan was enforced, there were two police leaderships: the provincial and the Conintes, each with its own line of authority and command. And although the provincial Ministry of Government tried to mediate between the two, the fact is that conflicts led, towards the end of 1960, to the resignation of Chief of Police Juan José Parotti who had been head of the force since the inauguration of Oscar Alende as governor of Buenos Aires province in May 1958⁸. This division in the police's management was a forerunner of what was to mature towards the end of the 1960s and, especially, during Argentina's last military dictatorship. That is, the coexistence of police forces which, on the one hand, exercised their visible task linked to everyday public security. And, on the other hand, those within the police that were involved in illegal repression alongside the military (Águila, 2018, pp. 121-146).

In this context of institutional conflict in the early 1960s, however, what was probably of least interest to the police and political leadership was to attend to the cases of police violence which, in the meantime, continued to occur. At the same time, anonymous letters circulating among police personnel questioned this subordination to military command, «forcing us to act in political repression, a cause which makes us antagonistic to the great mass of the population». While it was unclear whether these anonymous police demands were issued by police personnel or not, they included labor demands such as equal pay with the military. Police intelligence reports carefully recorded the appearance of these pamphlets, which became more and more frequent throughout the 1960s, culminating in the police strike of March 1973⁹.

The Conintes plan gave rise to another type of denunciation, with a political content, but for the same reasons as those of the daily victims of police violence. They came from those detained at the disposal of Executive authorities, who suffered humiliation and torture similar to that of common prisoners. Even so, the vi-

⁸ Parotti's resignation was preceded by several moments throughout 1960 when he asked for leave or announced and then denied his departure from office. He finally did so on 24 November 1960. CDA.CPM. File 10375, pages 3, 51, 52, 58, 89-91.

⁹ Barreneche, 2011, pp. 221-239. Regarding the police claims of 1960-61, see CDA.CPM. File 10375, pages 79-88 and 139-141.

olence directed at political «targets» implied a direct and greater responsibility on the part of police chiefs. For example, the lawsuit brought by the head of coordination and liaison of the Conintes plan in the Buenos Aires province police, Inspector Emir Marino, against members of the La Plata regional committee of the CGT - Confederación General del Trabajo (Trade Union General Confederation). In it, Marino stated that he was neither the author nor the promoter of the harassment suffered by the detained trade union leaders. This police chief presented his complaint to the criminal justice court in La Plata and a hearing was set up, where the case was aired. However, more than Marino's statements, it was more important for the Conintes military authorities not to open any legal space for denunciations or discussions about the abuses and violence. After this hearing, the case was forgotten. The growing political repression was closing the space for conscientious objections¹⁰. On the other hand, as we shall see, the ordinary justice system in general did not want to get involved in the investigation of these cases, which became a «political» matter. Here again we see a background of overlapping forms of justice which were intertwined and which helped to consolidate impunity in police-military actions from then until the end of the military dictatorship in 1983¹¹.

The successive acts of police violence that seem to have escalated since the end of 1959 led to a political involvement at both national and provincial parliamentary level. As a result of the complaints made by the La Plata Bar Association and the exposure of the problem in the newspapers, Governor Oscar Alende set up an investigative commission made up of representatives of the Executive and Legislative branches of government, as well as the Bar Association. The commission began its work on 15 May 1960¹². At the same time, the parliamentary opposition in the Buenos Aires legislature proposed the creation of another commission of enquiry into these cases of unlawful coercion¹³. The issue was also dealt with in the National Congress. On 21 April 1960, a Commission of Inquiry into Unlawful Arrests and Torture was set up in the National Chamber of Deputies¹⁴.

¹⁰ CDA.CPM. File 10375, pages 87 and 93-94.

¹¹ Military Courts intervened in many cases during these decades. Montero, 2023, pp, 1-19.

¹² CDA.CPM. File 10375, page 7.

¹³ CDA.CPM. File 10375, page 60.

¹⁴ Congreso de la Nación Argentina. *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Diputados* (Argentinian Congress. Journal of Sessions of the Chamber of Deputies). Session of 21 July 1960. Buenos Aires: Imprenta del Congreso, 1961. File 1378, pages 79 and 80. See also Castronuovo, 2018.

The work of these commissions and their results were disparate. On the one hand, with their enquiries into cases of police violence, the reports produced dispelled doubts as to whether the episodes analyzed were exceptions or examples of a systematically applied police methodology. All concluded that it was the latter. The tough police of the 1930s may have resorted to the same degrees of violence and illegal coercion as the tough police of the early 1960s. But while the former did so at the risk and expense of each of the local political bosses to whom they answered, the latter applied them with the implicit endorsement of police, political and even judicial authorities at the highest level.

3. Police and criminal justice

What was the role of criminal judges in dealing with formal accusations of violence and/or corruption against police officers? An analysis of 57 court cases in which one or more Buenos Aires provincial police officers were charged between 1957 and 1968 may provide some clues in this regard. These cases focus on the neighborhoods and towns surrounding the city of Buenos Aires, and on the city of La Plata, the provincial capital, which is part of the same area. There are 23 cases from La Plata and adjacent areas, while the rest correspond to the municipal jurisdictions that limit with the city of Buenos Aires (19 cases from the southern, 8 from the western and 10 from the northern districts)¹⁵.

Judicial sources in general, and specifically criminal cases, have been used by historians over the last thirty years to analyze a variety of issues. Having long since overcome the question of their 'representativeness', it is now accepted that even with a large volume of court files it is not possible to conclude with a totalizing perspective. Without going any further, the "black figure of crime" (unreported or unprosecuted cases) is a reality not only today but also in the past (Barreneche, 2015). The richness of these historical sources lies, rather, in the opportunity they give us to make contact with a universe that, even if mediated by the judicial format and discourse, opens a window to look at the past. Therefore, the aim here is not so much a territorial «representativeness» of the sample as a possibility of studying, with these sources, the issue of police violence and corruption.

¹⁵ To the east, the city borders the Rio de la Plata River.

With regard to the accusations against police officers, 64% of them concern cases of illegal harassment, abuse of authority or injuries. In other words, the majority of these cases were generally linked to episodes of police violence. On the other hand, 36% corresponded to charges of illegal exactions, fraud and swindling, theft or illegal gambling which were accusations related to corruption.

For their part, judicial inquiries were directed both at police officers who acted alone or as part of “patotas” (police’s undercover operative groups) of two or more police officers. Half of the cases corresponded to charges against large groups of police officers, identified as the entire guard or shift of a police station or, directly, the entire staff of a police station.

With regard to the police rank of the accused, the cases analyzed reflected, to some extent, the institutional hierarchical pyramid. There were many more police officers accused who were of lower rank than those who belonged to the ranks of supervisors and chiefs, respectively. The latter were generally charged in cases where the accusation extended to all police personnel in, for example, a police station. It is interesting to note that most of the cases involving corruption charges were directed against police acting individually or between two or three officers and, in turn, these were generally located in the police’s lower ranks. The accusations against supervisors and chiefs, on the other hand, focused more on cases of police violence, in which the accusations were mostly collective and not specifically directed at them.

The places where police officers were alleged to have committed these crimes also gave some indication of the blurred boundary between legal and illegal police action and practices. Just over half of the cases occurred in police stations, all of them linked to episodes of violence, as indicated above. On the other hand, the events related to police corruption took place mostly at the victims' places of residence or work. It can therefore be inferred that the growing network of political protection which allowed an increase in police abuses and violence for specific purposes, found in police stations the appropriate place for its development and execution. Police stations were, as these cases indicated, the places where this police violence was carried out, even if it had begun when the victims were detained elsewhere. On the other hand, police corruption went to meet its targets, wherever they were, and it was there, outside police stations, where it was committed.

Beyond the features of each judicial case, the duration of these proceedings and the judges' decisions in each of them suggest that, for the most part, they did not prosper either in terms of time or in terms of condemning the police involved. In

fact, very few of these criminal cases were initiated *ex officio* or by an independent judicial investigation. It was mainly the result of complaints from private individuals that triggered each case. The data collected on these complainants, the vast majority of whom were men, provide some other clues. Eighty-eight per cent were Argentinian and half of them were between 30 and 47 years of age, each with a declared work or professional activity. In this respect, it is also interesting to note that 38.5% of these victims were young people between 18 and 27 years of age and, in almost all of these cases, the complaints were for police violence. This seems to reinforce the certainty that young people at the time were suspected by the police and one of their "targets" when it came to the raids that led to the reported abuses.

The vast majority of criminal cases brought against police officers were of short duration. More than two thirds of them were resolved in less than six months. With some exceptions, the cases examined were not voluminous, although it was also observed that the judges who acted in each case took the corresponding legal provisions. First of all, they ordered the prosecution of the accused police officers, especially in individual cases. Then they also took care to obtain witness statements or to order routine procedural measures. However, it is clear that the magistrates did not consider circumstantial evidence that could have strengthened the charges against the police officers. In general, and despite the fact that some of them were proven, they dismissed the criminal action against the accused. The vast majority of police officers avoided punishment, either by way of judge's case dismissal (81%), lack of evidences (9%) or for other similar reasons.

In only four of the 57 cases were police officers convicted. Three of these cases involved police officers who acted alone and whose intention was to steal or obtain money from their intended victims. Two of them were officers and a third was a novice. These policemen were each sentenced to a few months' imprisonment and dismissed from the police force. No convictions for police violence were found.

The fourth case, in which two police officers were convicted, is very different and merits special analysis. It is the criminal case brought in April 1961 against *Comisario* (Commissioner) Adam Scala, head of the San Martin Police Investigation Bureau, and his staff. The judicial proceedings were compiled on an extended file along five years and it consisted of four sections and several annexes. The last judicial actions in the case were taken in December 1966. It is, in many ways, an exception to the general picture we have outlined so far and sheds light on police practices as well as on links, loyalties and rivalries between police officers. However, as

we shall see, the case does not totally differ from the judicial trend of acquittal that has been marked previously.

This case was initiated in an extraordinary way. The increasing complains against police violence since the late 1950s led to the creation, in April 1960, of a Special Investigative Commission in the National Chamber of Deputies. One of its members was the veteran political leader Alfredo Palacios who had managed to get the written press interested in the work he and his colleagues were trying to do. This Commission conducted hearings on police violence and inspected police stations suspected of being places where such violence and abuses were taking place. On 19 May 1961, on the basis of an anonymous data indicating that torture was being carried out in the San Martín Police Investigation Bureau, the Commission received a call from two police officers, apparently «repentant», who were prepared to collaborate in verifying these facts. They were police officers Roberto Luis Rodríguez and Miguel Yajubw who belonged to the Bureau's personnel. The following day, both policemen took Palacios and the members of the Parliamentary Commission to the private home of police officer Fermín Sánchez, driver of Commissioner Adam Scala, Chief of the San Martín Investigations Bureau, and there they seized from him a wooden box containing a *picana eléctrica* (electric prod), the instrument of torture which had been the reason for the anonymous accusations.

In the following days, the Commission carried out intense work taking testimonies from Chief Scala, Police Supervisor Mario Gragitena, the driver Sanchez, and other members of the police station in question. At the same time, the Parliamentary Commission received the testimonies of several detainees imprisoned at the Bureau's headquarter, who confirmed that they had been victims of torture with electric prods at the time of their arrest.

At the same time, since May 13, there had been an investigation for illegal extortion initiated in the San Martín Investigations Bureau where the accused were precisely police officers Roberto Luis Rodríguez and Miguel Yajubw. They were suspects of bribing businessman Alberto Ismael Bugallo under the accusation that clandestine betting games were being played in his business. As direct boss of Rodríguez and Yajubw, supervise officer Gragitena had initiated the investigation against them together with Commissioner Scala. Everything seemed to indicate that Gragitena took legal action against the two police officers in question because they, in turn, had kept the bribe money for themselves. In retaliation, Gragitena and Scala initiated the investigation. But in turn, seeing themselves accused,

Rodríguez and Yajubw decided to take revenge by denouncing their bosses and directing the Parliamentary Commission to the place where they knew the instrument of torture was hidden.

These cross accusations exposed a pattern of police violence and corruption that had been so often denounced but for which some concrete evidence was now emerging. To begin with, the physical evidence of the electric prod, a much-talked-about but rarely verified torture device. In one of the annexes to this case, the Materials Testing and Technological Research Laboratory (LEMIT) of the Ministry of Public Works of the Province of Buenos Aires was asked to carry out an expert analysis of the electric prod. The expert informant, Engineer Américo Boero, reported that the device was made from an automobile coil, and that it could be powered either «from the domestic electrical network or from a 6 Volt electric accumulator». The electric prod was therefore very versatile in its use. It was also indicated that the device was similar to those used on animals, but differed on two points: the police prod had a short application rod, which allowed the person applying it to be very close to the victim, whereas in the case of animals, the application rod was long («in the order of one and a half meters») to prevent a violent reaction from the animal reaching the user. The other point of difference, according to the expert, was that in the police prod, the tips of the application rod, through which the electric shock circulated, were «rounded» because «it was in the interest of avoiding the production of skin abrasions». Indeed, one of the precautions in the use of this instrument of torture was to prevent its application from leaving marks on the victim's skin, which could later be used as evidence. In the conclusions of his report, engineer Boero indicated that the apparatus was fit for operation and that the discharge «in vacuum», that is to say without applying it to the skin, measured «6500 volts». However, he clarified that

to carry out the measurement or value of the volt power in real conditions, it is necessary to apply it to the skin; [but] it could not be carried out due to the intense painful sensation it produced in those who tried to undergo the experiment¹⁶.

¹⁶ Ministerio de Obras Públicas de la Provincia de Buenos Aires. Laboratorio de Ensayo de Materiales e Investigaciones Tecnológicas (Ministry of Public Works of the Province of Buenos Aires. Materials Testing and Technological Research Laboratory -LEMIT). File 2407-5016/1962. Case 14803. Body One. Pages 556 and 557.

The accumulation of proves by the Parliamentary Commission was highlighted by special news in the written press all of which was incorporated as evidences. Meanwhile, the Police of the Buenos Aires Province, through its Judicial Affairs Department, initiated inquires on the case. At the same time, the criminal justice system intervened and after recusals and declarations of incompetence, the whole case was left in the hands of Judge Omar Roberto Ozafrain of the La Plata Judicial Department, although the last dispositions were taken by La Plata Third Criminal Appeals Court. Many of those involved were arrested, starting with Rodríguez, Yajubw and Sanchez. Gragitena and Scala himself were also detained but only for a short time.

Among the complexities of the case, the intervention of the three branches of the State government in the investigation of the case stands out. On the one hand, the legislative power through the Parliamentary Commission, whose functions extended to the judicial sphere since it took testimonies, investigated suspects, seized evidence and exhibited its results in the media. On the other hand, the executive power, hand in hand with the police itself, since, through its Judicial Affairs Department took the initiative of investigating on the case. Thus, for example, Commissioner Scala acted as police chief investigator in the case of bribe collected by Rodríguez and Yajubw until he himself was arrested, even though he had already been denounced by them before the Parliamentary Commission. Finally, the judiciary, whose initial intervention was focused on resolving the recusals and excusals of the acting judges until finally, as indicated, the case felt in the hands of Judge Ozafrain. By then, many of the evidences did no longer exist or had been spoiled from a legal point of view. Thus, for example, the electric prod, exhibited by Palacios in the press, could not be taken into account as evidence because of the manner in which it had been obtained.

In the end, all those accused of police violence were acquitted. The criminal decision, at least, did not take into account the numerous testimonies of the detainees or the other evidence presented although the policemen prosecuted were expelled from the police ranks according to the administrative inquiry carried out in parallel. Despite appeals, Scala and several of his subordinates were dismissed from the law enforcement agency. The argument, in this case, was the public repercussion of these events. Only Rodríguez and Yajubw were criminally sentenced to two years

in prison for the crime of Illegal Exactions, that is, for the bribe they had collected from businessman Bugallo¹⁷.

The Scala case uncovered some important aspects linked to police violence and corruption in the period under study. But despite all the data and evidence that emerged the final resolution of the case did not vary much from all the other cases. There were few guilty sentences against the police in the criminal justice system and the major «punishment» was that those involved were expelled from the agency. The Parliamentary Commission, perhaps more concerned with exposing the facts publicly than bringing those defendants to justice, concluded its work without being able to fully unravel the network of complicity that sustained such conducts. The ordinary criminal justice system, for its part, acted in the face of the facts and, as had occurred in the other cases studied, limited itself to considering them in isolation, resulting in the dismissal of the initial accusations. If the Scala case escaped, in part, from the aforementioned general parameter, it was due to the disagreements and rivalries between the policemen themselves.

4. Conclusion

Towards the end of the 1950s the police of the Buenos Aires Province included 'new' forms of political and ordinary violence which prompted reactions and complaints from various sectors. Both politically and socially, collectively and individually, there were voices of alarm and denunciation of such abuses. On the other hand, it was observed that State and judicial political tolerance as well as the growing legal framework of exception during those years created the conditions for such practices. Along with political violence the police also deployed criminal investigation strategies in which illegal coercion became a substantial part of them.

In the long history of police violence, we identify this particular moment in the early 1960s as significant. Exceptional norms such as the Conintes plan not only reinforced these patterns of ordinary and political violence. They also raised conflicts of interest and duplicity of operational command within the law enforcement

¹⁷ Yajubw was given a two-year suspended prison sentence, while Rodriguez was sentenced to two years and six months in prison to be served, as he already had a criminal record. In addition, the sentence of the La Plata Third Court of Appeal included the prohibition of both from holding public office. Case 14803. Body One, 9 August 1966, Page 437.

agencies. The possibility of operating between a formal legal system and this other “extraordinary” (as illegal) framework opened a gap through which it was also possible for policemen to obtain personal benefits in a context of growing impunity.

The analysis of these 57 criminal cases identified during the period under study in which Province of Buenos Aires police officers were charged allowed us to approach the issue from a different perspective. These documents not only provided valuable information on police practices at that time but also introduced another important actor in the historical plot: the criminal justice system. In the face of police violence and corruption and the political protection for it the question remained as to the role of the justice system in all of this.

The analysis of these criminal cases could serve to begin to unravel the complexities of crime, police, politics and justice. The criminal justice system operated with caution in the face of complaints of police violence and/or corruption. In the examined cases it could be seen that the judges took the corresponding legal measures but at the same time dismissed many of the accusations or quickly resolved the cases by acquitting the defendant police officers. On these matters, the judiciary always acted as a result of complaints from private individuals but it did not take any initiative as far as legal inquiries was concern. The exception of the Scala case was developed through the Parliamentary Investigation Commission and we can say that the justice system was late in gathering the evidence that could have served to reach a greater level of depth in the scheme of violence or corruption within the police institution.

This historical analysis, focused on the case of the province of Buenos Aires between the late 1950s and early 1970s, indicates that police abuses linked to the growing State illegal violence took on certain particularities that became more pronounced as the period progressed. But at the same time, it shows that the forms and practices of such violence had a significant experimental field in common, everyday cases. The exacerbated political conflicts gave rise to the use of the police «resource» of violence directed at adversaries while police doctrine imposed a model of operational action indistinct for these cases and for those of ordinary competence. The monopoly of public force, in this context, was exercised by a police agency that applied it in all contingencies. And the «exceptional» legal framework that allowed the police to repress political dissidence, social protest or civil disobedience was extended so that police violence could also be consolidated in

the field of ordinary action, where these exceptionalities «supposedly» had no scope.

Thus, by the beginning of the last military dictatorship in 1976, soldiers' presence on the streets, the sound of police sirens at night, military-police operations of arresting or even killing "alleged" guerrilla fighters on the spot, etc. became part of an ordinary social and political landscape in Argentina. Although it is not right to argue that all these became "naturalized" by civil population it is also true that previous decades of State abuse of authority, police violence, and judicial indifference, contributed to the fact that while all these took place many people acted "normally" going to work and living their ordinary lives every day.

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6. Curriculum vitae

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