



**2013 -2014 TITLE VIII RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM  
FINAL REPORT**

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*Re-Membering in Transition: Trajectories of Violence, Structures of Denial, and the Struggle for Meaning  
in Post-Communist Albania*

Program Dates: September 1, 2013 – January 15, 2013

Tirana, Albania

**Research Abstract:**

During my 2013 – 2014 ACIES Advanced Scholars Language Training and Research grant period, I combined 10 hours of language instruction per week with continued interviews and research for my book project, *Re-Membering in Transition: Trajectories of Violence, Structures of Denial, and the Struggle for Meaning in Post-Communist Albania*. I conducted extensive participant observation, small-group, and one-on-one interviews with religiously, politically, and regionally diverse families of ex-political prisoners and formerly persecuted families (EPP / FPF). In addition, I had frequent informal conversation and conducted interviews with members of government, I/NGOs, university professors and students, and the media, and I conducted two pilot focus groups with members of the transition generation. Throughout this time, I continued to give guest lectures and talks to university classes and at human rights events. From this research, I conclude that the failure in Albania (and, more broadly, in the Western Balkans and Southeast Europe) of accepted mechanisms of rehabilitation and reintegration of EPP / FPF forces us to call into question two of the primary vehicles through which development practices have attempted to facilitate human rights work in post-communist countries: transitional justice mechanisms and human rights nongovernmental organizations. In order to be effective in the future, the next stage of human rights work in Albania will need to include concrete, targeted work with the transition-generation that identifies specific points of conflict and intersection in their family

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histories and uses these as a starting point for integrating the fragmented and fractured memories and identities that still rend the social fabric in Albania.

**Research Goals:**

My goals with the American Council's Title VIII Research and Language Training Program funding were to: 1) develop my Albanian language proficiency to an intermediate level while 2) continuing research for book my project *Re-Membering in Transition: Trajectories of Violence, Structures of Denial, and the Struggle for Meaning in Post-Communist Albania*.

I worked on my language acquisition with two different private tutors. One, a recent college graduate, met me at my apartment twice a week, during which time we worked on translating relevant newspaper articles from Albanian to English (this helped me to build subject-specific vocabulary as well as to read popular media reports on protests, petitions, and speeches of ex-political prisoners and political party rhetoric about issues related to compensation, rehabilitation, and reintegration). My primary tutor was an experienced teacher, very connected to a wide range of intellectuals and people in university and government. I met with her at her apartment and in various local settings twice a week; our work proceeded completely in Albanian, and, with her, I studied grammar in the course of practicing conversational Albanian via discussions of life under communism and in transition. She introduced me to important contacts for my work, including a prominent historian working at the Center for Albanological Studies and Liri Belashova, one of the most important figures of the communist period.

I had a total of 10 hours per week of language instruction, through which my Albanian has progressed to a lower intermediate conversational level. I am now able to read most popular media accounts well enough to understand the primary gist of the reports on my own, and, with the help of a dictionary, to relatively quickly untangle more complex points.

I continued my research with three of my primary study groups: the Association of ex-political prisoners and formerly persecuted families in Shkodra; the group of political prisoners that staged the 2012 Hunger Strikes in which two participants set themselves on fire; and the Albanian Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Trauma and Torture. In addition, I added three new groups: the ex-political prisoners from the community of Shkrel, a group of former prisoners of Spaç based in the South of Albania (primarily Saranda and the vicinity); and a Greek Orthodox community on the Greek border in

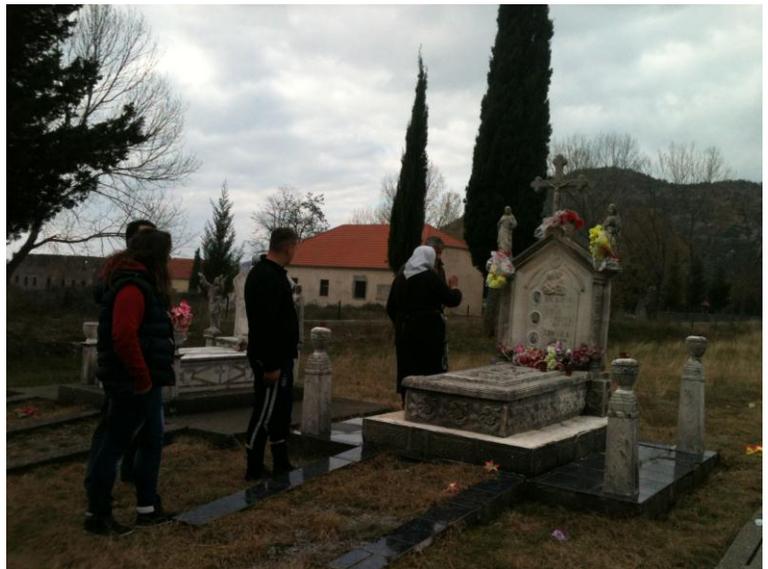
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the mountains of Labovë. I continued my collaboration with university faculties (European University of Tirana, New York University, Medical University of Tirana, University of Tirana Faculties of History and Philology, Journalism, Political Science, and Sociology), as well as with officials in government, at the US Embassy, the OSCE, and the UNDP.

**Research Activities:**

My project, *Re-Membering in Transition*, initially proposed to investigate the relationship between the increasingly authoritarian public sphere in Albania and the legacy of totalitarian repression by triangulating work with two regionally and experientially distinct communities of ex-political prisoners and formerly persecuted families (EPP / PPF) and local government officials in their counties of residence (specifically, communities of ex-political prisoners in Shkodër, in the northern Albanian Alps, and in the south-central region of Fier-Shtyllës).

Following the loss of the Democratic Party in the 2013 Parliamentary elections, there was a falling-out between one of my primary access points to the Fier-Shtyllës community and community members that I had previously interviewed. At the same time, I was able to gain privileged access to two alternative communities: a network of Orthodox, economically successful ex-political prisoners originally from the southern coastal region of Sarandë and Greek border area of Gjirokastër, and a heavily persecuted community in the southern mountain area of Labovë, near the southwestern border with Greece. Access to these two communities allowed me to triangulate perspectives from multiple identity categories: economically successful populations of ex-political prisoners (primarily affiliated with the Democratic Party); Orthodox, Catholic, and (nominally) Muslim populations; and long-term



Members of the Pllëmbi family in Shkrel at the grave of a Kol Martin, a relative executed under the regime. Originally buried in a secret grave, the family was able to piece together information about where the body was located, exhume, and re-bury the body in a family plot.

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persecuted and children of the Nomenklatura persecuted following the cultural revolution (70s and later).

In addition to the local government officials I had intended to interview, I was fortunate to gain access to people who had held high positions in the government and judiciary during the time of transition and who were directly involved with the political, legal, and economic measures of rehabilitation, reintegration, and compensation for EPP / FPF. In addition, I interviewed the heads of both the Socialist and Democratic Parties' associations of ex-political prisoners, as well government officials from the Office of the Ombudsman and private lawyers who worked as prosecutors under the communist regime.



Fabian Kati, film maker, in his home-town of Libovë

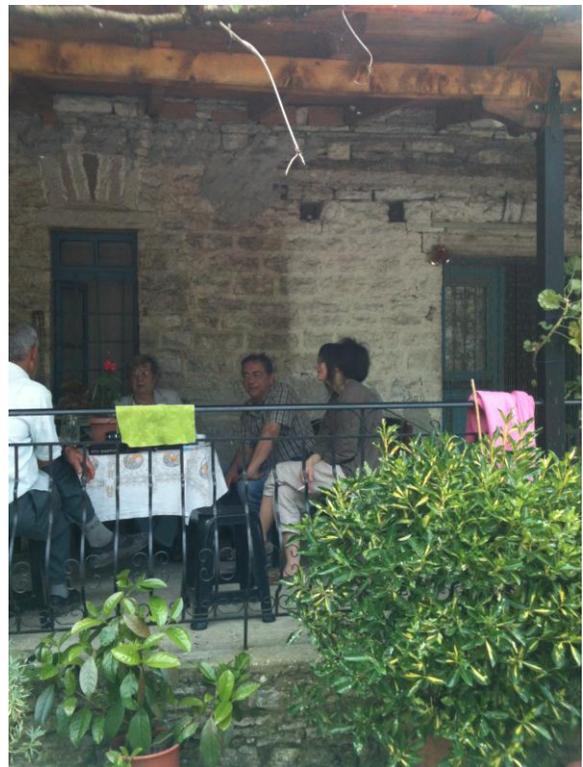
In addition to my planned participant-observation with the Shkodra community, I spent two weeks with an extended network of families in the Malësi e Madhë region of Shkrel. This group of people is not formally organized into a community association and is suspicious of the Albanian Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Trauma and Torture (one of the primary backers of the Shkodra Association). Initially, I was invited to Shkrel for a week's celebrations of the Feast of Shën Koll, after which I returned with a documentary filmmaker to conduct interviews with members of the extended family/ community who had been part of the Malësi e Madhe and Postriba uprisings in

the 1940s. Surviving members of the Prek Çali family gave extensive interviews. During this time, it became clear that the community is very invested in locating the remains of a priest that was executed under the regime. As I am in contact with a group of archeologists working in the region, and the ground penetrating radar the archeologists use to survey dig sites might be of use in the search for the priest's remains, I have put members of the Catholic community in Shkrel in touch with the team leader of a dig in the Shkrel area. Should the community be able to locate remains, I will travel back to Shkrel to participate in the exhumation and commemoration activities.

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I also spent several weeks meeting with and interviewing Tirana-based members of a network of former Spaç prisoners from the South of Albania who have maintained close business and social bonds since the fall of the regime. As a result of these interviews, I was invited for an extended visit to meet and interview members of this community in Saranda; we traveled together, visited historic and archeological sites important to the group, and I stayed with one of the families in a house in Saranda. This participant observation opportunity provided especially important insight into a group of former prisoners whose identities are based on a sense of agency possible after the prison experience; they are all successful in business and have devoted lives to raising families, sending children to university, and restoring what they define as a moral universe. This is an Orthodox community, so the opportunity to develop relationships with them also provided important perspectives through which to reflect on the somewhat different experiences of the Catholic communities in the north and the large numbers of predominantly agnostic / nominally Muslim people with whom I have worked.

I was also fortunate to be able to meet and work with a small community of people from the mountains of Labovë, on the Greek border outside of Gjirokastër. I made 2 trips to this community, which were particularly noteworthy in that the second and third trips revealed ways in which the community itself is very divided about their history; these divisions are not merely historical / ideological. As this is a very small community and one prominent family owned most of the land prior to expropriation, ongoing disputes within branches of the family about land ownership leave the family today with open hostility and, at times, aggressive attempts to exercise power/ control over relatives perceived to be a threat to economic interests. This is a particularly interesting community to have been able to visit as members of the community's leading family were, at various periods throughout the regime, part of the communist governing structure, imprisoned, and interned. Today's disputes and alignments in this



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community thus coalesce issues of the nomenklatura and purges, long-term politically persecuted, and expropriation and privatization/ compensation in transition-era politics.

My research with communities of Ex-political prisoners / formerly persecuted families thus exceeded my initial goals proposed in my ACIES application. However, due to a falling-out between one of my primary field contacts and the representative of the Fier-Shtyllës community, I did not continue work with that group during my ACIES tenure. If possible, in subsequent research trips I will conduct follow-up work my primary contacts inside of the community, but, at this time (in large measure because of tensions following the loss of the Democratic Party (DP) to the Socialist Party (SP) Coalition in the June 2013 Parliamentary elections), additional site visits were not feasible.

The change in government did not, however, impede my research with the governmental personnel with whom I wanted to conduct modified life history interviews. However, once on the ground, I had a significant number of opportunities open up to me that caused me to slightly shift the emphasis of research in this area. In addition to discussions with local government officials in my communities' municipalities and districts, I was able to conduct extensive interviews with people who had been part of the transition government and directly involved in passing the laws and establishing the commissions that shaped the course of transition politics with ex-political prisoners and formerly persecuted families. In tandem with this, I interviewed people who had held high positions in the judiciary (office of the General Procurator, investigators, and judges) under the communist regime. Among the most important of these interviews were: Spartak Ngjella (DP MP 2001 – 2009); Visar Zhiti (DP MP 1996 – 1997); Kristaq Traja (Member Constitutional Draft Committees 1991 – 1998, Chief of Staff, Minister of Legislative Reform 1997 – 1998, Deputy Minister of Justice 1993 – 1995); Shpetim Roci (Bali Kombetar Party, MP); Artur Selmani (Office of the Prosecutor General); Hajradin Hysa (Chief Judge, Mirëditë District, 1985 – 1990). Additionally, I was able to interview the heads of the current National Association for Ex-Political Prisoners, the head of the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes (1999-2013), the son one of one of the early leaders of the ex-political prisoners (and now newly appointed head of the National Association), and the chair of the Socialist Party working group for ex-political prisoners.

I also conducted two pilot focus groups designed to gather preliminary data about the trans-generational transmission of trauma and the differences of experience, memory, and identity among

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Transcribig Focus Group Key Points

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relatively close age cohorts. Each focus group centered around the central question of whether participants think that the communist past continues to effect their lives, and, if so, how. The first group, targeting people who were children during the transition or born after transition, included participants between the ages of 22 and 32. The second group, targeting people who were adolescents or young adults during transition, included participants between the ages of 33 and 43.

I also conducted multiple in-depth one-on-one interviews with the mobilizing members of the 2012 hunger strike, Skëndër Tufa and Perikli Shqevi, as well as a four-hour group interview with 8 of the strikers. I was a participant-observer at multiple group functions (a memorial service, press conferences, public protest actions, and planning meetings). I continued ongoing discussions of the hunger strikes in particular and the situation of ex-political prisoners and the formerly persecuted in general with my wide network multiple NGOs and civil society organizations. I also continued to give guest lectures at Tirana universities.

For participant observation, travel, and home and community visits, members of the families/ communities with whom I was working provided informal translation as part of our conversational structure. As per IRB research protocol H13475, I obtained informed consent from participants verbally during the audio recording and informed consent, without names or identifying information, is part of the audio transcription. All interviews are recorded on a digital audio recorder, transferred and encrypted via FileVault to a password protected hard drive, and erased from the digital audio recorder. For intensive one-one-one interviews, interviews with government officials, and the focus groups, I employed a professional translator who provided simultaneous translation.

**Important Research Findings:**

My participant observation with the Shkodra association of ex-political prisoners was unremarkable. I deepened existing relationships and gained perspective on their feelings about the change in government, but this work did not call into question or significantly alter any of my basic

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research assumptions. Interestingly, this area has been a bastion of Democratic Party support since the 1991 transition, but, in the 2013 Parliamentary elections, DP support was significantly lower, with a sizeable portion of the population voting for the Socialist Party coalition. For the first time since transition, the Shkodra vote went against the DP. The Shkrel community was particularly interesting in that a group of the younger transition-era generation who maintain alignments with the Democratic Party have mobilized for a reform of the DP from within. The Labovë community is a primarily Socialist Party base, while the Saranda community of economically successful ex-political prisoners remains staunchly loyal to the ousted DP (and several members of this group have lost their government positions following the 2013 SP-coalition victory).



Group of Political Prisoners as the trial of Perekli Shqevi, accused of helping Gjergj Ndreça set himself on fire during the 2012 hunger strike

Prior to the elections, a group of former prisoners staged a 2012 hunger strike (September – October) in which 2 participants set themselves on fire (one of whom subsequently died from his injuries); this group continued staging protests against the ruling Democratic Party until after the DP defeat in June 2013, and members of this group perceive their strike and continued protests to have helped defeat the DP. Leading up to the election, the demands of this group focused largely upon payment of compensations. Despite the seeming simplicity of this literal legal claim,

the rhetorics of the demand and the manner in which it evolved suggest that the demand functioned multidirectionally to focus and mobilize the emotional energies of the group and to articulate the group's purpose for an international audience (human rights organizations and embassies that attempted early intervention with the group challenged them with the simple question: what do you want? – a question to which there were various and competing answers, none of which fit the discourse genres of international aid or humanitarian assistance).

Party politics were at stake as well. The complex political terrain here includes the vicious struggle for power between the Socialist Party (SP) (reformed from the communist Party of Labour) and

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the Democratic Party, (DP) which came into power as the anti-communist opposition in the early 90's and consolidated EPP/FPF as an important part of its political base. Appropriation and exploitation of former prisoners/ persecuted families contributes to rifts and splits between groups (calling themselves associations) claiming to represent ex-political prisoners. While multiple and competing groups exist, a government-recognized National Association of EPP / FPF was formed in 1991. In 1997, following a devastating economic collapse, the group split; backed by international players seeking an alternative to the ruling DP, then-leader Kurt Kola joined forces with prominent human rights activists and formed the opposition party Forum for Democracy. Skënder Tufa, then-chair of the Tirana branch of the National Association, claims that he then took over leadership of the National Association, though it is unclear exactly how and when leadership that was recognized by the government and worked within governmental channels eventually resumed. I have found no indication that Tufa was ever officially working with the government commissions for compensation, status, rehabilitation, or reintegration functioning at that time (though, during the period of anarchy falling the collapse of the government in 1997, none of these commissions were actually functioning . . . ). Following this very murky period, Tufa maintained a list of EPP / FPF that he defines as the "membership" of the "only" "National Association," of which he calls himself the leader. Whatever the circumstances of Tufa's relationship to the groups of EPP as they were re-aligning during this time, his claims to sole authority as the recognized leader of a National Association are not supportable; he as far as I can determine, he has never been officially designated by a governmental body charged with handling claims for legal status, education, housing, or compensations of EPP / FPP.

Nevertheless, Tufa does have a roster of people aligned with him on whom he can call to mobilize public actions. This group aligned with Tufa was, during the lead-up to the 2013 general elections, strongly opposed to the DP, particularly to Sali Berisha, the 2005 – 2013 Prime Minister and leader of the DP from 1991 – 1992 and 1997 -2013. In broad brush strokes, anti-DP rhetoric claims that political prisoners aligned with the DP were spies under the regime and that the DP leadership uses incriminating evidence from their files of their roles as informers to control them (where "files" refers to the secret police files, which have never been opened – it is widely rumored that secret archives have been used as blackmail tools throughout the course of transition).

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Hunger Strike as Political Discourse.

In many respects, the September – October 2012 hunger strike followed the genre of hunger strikes as political discourse in Albania (including early 1990s student hunger strikes against the former communist regime, periodic hunger strikes of ex-political prisoners in the 1990s, student-led hunger strikes following the 1997 economic collapse, and the 2010 SP hunger strike protesting the DP refusal to open ballot boxes after the disputed 2009 general elections). However, the self-immolations mark a significant difference in the discourse pattern, begging the question: why self-immolation now, and not in previous strikes? From the perspective of narrative field, what are the differences in the rhetorical situation? Depending on how we read the act of self-immolation (as suicidal rage? Desire to be a martyr?), we raise several important questions about emotion and motive as well as about shifts in rhetorical situation, including:

- a. age of the strikers (where the narrative about how many have recently died dominated early conversations with the group);
- b. foreshortened future (where, in the twenty years since the communist government collapsed, surviving prisoners living in extreme poverty have lost hope for a future. Simultaneously, the majority of young people in the country know very little about the system of prisons, internment, and exile of the communist regime, leaving many of the former prisoners to feel that they have been forgotten, are functionally the "living dead" about whom nobody cares.)
- c. the global economic crisis and its effects on the Albanian economy;
- d. the deteriorating political sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Following the SP-coalition win in the June 2013 elections, there was a brief period of what seemed like cooperation between the government and the group of EPP that had organized the 2012 hunger strike. During this time, the SP was deciding on new leadership for the National Association of

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<sup>1</sup> Tufa has in fact been lobbying to have Lirak Bejko, the hunger striker who died from self-immolation, declared a national hero. The desire to have a martyr for the cause is a strong motivator, obviously, but I am currently tracking down the truth of a story that Bejko was involved in a kidnapping in Brussels several years previous to his participation in the 2012 Hunger strikes. If this is true, it raises questions about a potentially more complex set of motivators for the self-immolation as well as Tufa's moves to define Bejko as a national hero and secure a martyr for his group.

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Ex-Political Prisoners and Formerly Persecuted Families and in the process of eliminating the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes (created by the DP in 2010, staffed with a DP loyalist in 2011, and operational from 2011 – 2013). However, members of the 2012 hunger strike maintained in interviews between September 2013 and January 2014 that they would continue the "war" against the "dictatorship" and for the compensations owed to political prisoners. Corollary to this, Skënder Tufa was clearly invested in getting the new government to appoint him as the Director of the National Association – a position that he did not get (and that he had no realistic possibility of getting). On 8 November 2014, Bedri Blloshmi was appointed head of the organization. During his short time in office, Blloshmi was under heavy media attack for what were perceived as family improprieties/ scandals; in July of 2014 Blloshmi was replaced with Bilal Kola, son of the Association's first formal head in the 1990s, Kurt Kola.

While the group of former prisoners that had led the 2012 Hunger Strikes were re-grouping to continue protests for the payment of compensations, the DP was organizing anti-government actions across multiple domains. In May 2014, a small group of FPP loyal to the DP staged an anti-government strike in front of



Parliament (this was in tandem with a DP hunger strike of workers who had been dismissed from their positions following the DP defeat in the June 2013 elections, and just prior to the decision to award Albania EU candidate status). In June 2014, Skënder Tufa told me in a follow-up conversation that the DP was paying the strikers claiming to represent the EPP in the May hunger strike (this same claim was of course made by the DP against the 2012 Hunger Strikers); however, Tufa and May 2014 hunger strike leader Fatmir Hoxha seem to have joined forces since in opposition to the SP government's compromise attempts to pay compensations to the most severely impacted group of surviving FPP.

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Woman in Labovë

The convolutions of the conflicted relations amongst groups of EPP / FPF and between this class and the general public testifies to the open – and, in many cases, still bleeding – wounds of the communist past and the ways which this legacy confronts the larger society in Albania with a complex nexus of political, economic, and social problems. Obviously, political parties appropriate and exploit members of these groups in partisan power struggles, but, beyond the crass fight for power/control, this exploitation continues the communist strategies of fragmentation, diversion, and distortion through which the population as a whole was rendered politically

and socially impotent. Political parties play on this class's fears and vulnerabilities, effectively fragmenting and polarizing groups against each other. This fragmentation and polarization reproduces the structures through which public show trials and definitions of "enemy of the state" legitimated violence against citizens under the regime. Accusations of being criminals-liars- thieves-degenerates-spies prevent the general public from being able to recognize legitimate claims the group(s) make or the ways that they may symbolize the wounds of a past that need to be confronted and worked through. Instead, Albanians remain trapped in the structures of denial, confusion, anger, fear, cynicism, and bitterness that defined the psychology of the regime at its worst.

**Policy Implications and Recommendations:**

The failure in Albania (and, more broadly, in the Western Balkans and Southeast Europe) of accepted mechanisms of rehabilitation and reintegration of EPP / FPF forces us to call into question two of the primary vehicles through which development practices have attempted to facilitate human rights

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work in post-communist countries: transitional justice mechanisms and human rights nongovernmental organizations. As early as 1996, Amnesty International understood that, in Albania, transitional justice mechanisms were being used as blatant attempts to purge political opposition (Abrahamson 1996) in what was effectively a continuation of one-party totalitarian rule. I am, however, more concerned with what seems to me to be an ongoing problem with human rights discourses and practices that exacerbate, rather than help, the human rights situation in Albania.

At the level of discourse, the Albanian situation is confused by terms that imply meanings either not applicable to the complicated legal and psychological realities of Albania's communist regime (which shifted over time from the late 40s through the late 80s), or that impose a set of meanings that add to the distortion of post-communist memory. For example, the term "political prisoner" did not exist under the communist regime as a legal category. Both Albania's constitution and the penal code through which the ideology of the state was (often arbitrarily) enforced structured a political and legal reality in which specific charges (for agitation and propaganda, for example, or treason) might be levied against a wide range of people for very different offenses. Both a person attempting to escape the country and a person attempting to organize an opposition political party would have been imprisoned for treason, as would a person who took extra dairy rations from the state cooperative (where such "theft" was considered a crime against the state) or who illicitly kept livestock for individual consumption. While the term "prisoner of conscience" might, broadly conceived, seem to apply to all of these cases, irrespective of the specific charge or circumstances of arrest, imprisonment, or internment, contemporary uses of the both the terms "political prisoner" and "prisoner of conscience" imply a notion of dissidence – of opposition to the state, either active (voicing opinions, organizing) or passive (being a member of a discriminated-against group). Thus, the terms "political prisoner" and "prisoner of conscience" become very problematic in Albania, where these terms are too broad and lack the nuance necessary to address the legal-moral-political realities of the communist regime and the post-communist human rights problems.

Not surprisingly, then, the class of EPP / FPF remains in a quagmire of attack/ counter-attack about who really was a political prisoner, who was and wasn't a spy, who, on the hierarchy of suffering, suffered most, and who has no right to the claim of "suffering." The fact that these terms imply a notion of dissidence is even more problematic. While other SEE / post-communist countries used the 1975

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Helsinki Accords to loosen the grip of repressive state policies, Albania – the only country in the region that *refused* to sign the Helsinki Final Act – in fact embarked on a "cultural revolution" modeled after China's; Hoxha purged the Politburo and the military, executing many high officials and sending their families into internment. The wave of purges in the 70s crushed even the possibility of a counter-culture, and it was not until Hoxha died in 1985 that Albania began to see any loosening of the repressive policies that characterized his increasingly paranoid and violent reign.

One particularly pernicious form of this violence continues to haunt family structures today. Over 80% of those executed by the regime were buried in secret graves. Not only were the bodies buried in secret (and sometimes mass) graves, bodies were frequently dug up and *re-buried*, offering additional safeguards against anybody being able to disclose the whereabouts of a body. The logic of secret burial is especially perverse given that the executions themselves were in general publicized. Indeed, the state demanded a public performance celebrating the killing of "enemies of the state." Let me offer a vignette by way of example. Arbën Theodhosi was interned in Kurbnësh, a hard labor camp in the copper mines in the northern Albanian Alps, when his father, Koço Theodhosi, formerly Minister of Industry, was executed in the Politburo purges of the 70s. After working all day in the mines, the workers were assembled for the evening head count and political speech, during which time it was announced that that Koço Theodhosi, enemy of the state, had been executed. As required, the prisoners assembled all clapped – the killing of the enemy of the state must be applauded. Arbën, in the only act of resistance available to him at that moment, crossed his arms over his chest and refused to clap for the execution of his father.

Under such circumstances, it is easy to see why Albania had no "dissident" movement to speak of. While the language of the Helsinki Accords was empowering people in the former Czechoslovakia, Poland, even Romania and the former Soviet Union, the group of people that might have been able to ride the wave of these movements in SEE were being imprisoned, interned, and executed. Hence, EPP / PPF who take revisionist stances towards history and try to stake a claim to political dissidence today are easily discredited. Equally problematic, the notion of dissidence implied in the terms "political prisoner" and "prisoner of conscience" make it impossible to see the ways in which survival under the regime often entailed acts of individual *internal resistance* – not political action, and certainly not collective organizing, but, rather, an internal emotional-psychological ability to hold a private belief, to keep a

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corner of the mind that the state could not occupy. How, for example, might we read Arbën crossing his arms over his chest and refusing to clap for his father's execution as an individual act of internal resistance, and how might the ability to uncover and interpret such acts allow us to deconstruct the simplistic categories of human rights discourses that in fact impede real human rights progress in Albania?

These factors contribute to the complex problem of division and fragmentation both amongst population of EPP / FPF and within the larger population. "Anti-communist" groups lay claim to an identity of "dissidence" that is used to cast any person who was not directly targeted by the regime as "communist" (and by extension a "perpetrator") and any person that was imprisoned/ interned as "dissident" (when this clearly was not the case). This is a serious problem in a country in which nearly 20% of the population was subject to extreme repressive measures (Krasniqi 2012); in which violence and state terror forced both active and passive complicity amongst the population as a whole (Agger & Jensen 1996; Amy 2010, 2011; Passernini 2005; Sherbakova 2005; Stan 2006); and in which the nature of a criminal state cannot be understood either in simple victim/ perpetrator terms or by a differentiation of "political" and "regular" prisoners. Just as the simplistic victim/ perpetrator divide occludes the more complex reality of the bystander and passive complicity, the distinction between "political" and "regular" prisoner occludes the much more complex continuum of violence structuring bad biographies and state exclusion, exile, internment, imprisonment, show trials, trumped up charges and false witnesses.

This problem in turn structures the equally complex problem of social service delivery to the population of EPP / FPF through NGO structures. Without exception, every single human rights NGO in the country was established and is still headed by the only group of people able to work with foreigners when the country opened its borders: educated people who could read, write, and speak in English, German, French, Italian . . . the educated elite who could interact with the agents of development entering the country in the early 90s. Often, these were the children of the nomenklatura – children who had spent the bulk of their adult lives in internment, exile, and prison, but who had, as children, been born into privileged families that were part of the apparatus of state power. While, to a Westerner, this might not seem like a crucial distinction, it is vital and debilitating inside of Albania. Many of the long-term persecuted still do not consider children of the nomenklatura (many of whom

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had fathers in the Politburo who were killed in the purges of the 70s and 80s and who spent 15 – 20 years of their lives in prison and hard labor camps) as legitimately "persecuted." For these people, any member of a family that was part of the state apparatus remains a "communist" and part of the class of perpetrators. Thus, the people whose NGOs receive funding and implement projects are already suspect, and those individuals/ families/ groups that might benefit from a specific organization's project are by extension suspect (of receiving money/ favors in return for "cooperation," political manipulation, lying, ignoring/ exploiting other groups).

As a concrete example to illustrate some of the problems I have indicated here, let me offer this vignette:

For several years, I have been talking with members of a cultural heritage organization about how to preserve and commemorate sites of traumatic memory in Albania. At the same time, I am conducting research with the government-sponsored National Association of Ex-Political Prisoners. A woman with whom I work from the National Association and a man with whom I work from the cultural heritage organization are cousins. Though I had known both for some time, they had never met. They met for the first time at a working dinner at my house, where I had gathered a small group of people to help me finalize details for focus groups on memory and identity I was about to conduct. Only *after* this meeting did I learn that the man's grandfather had held a high position in the secret police under the regime; in this position, the grandfather was part of the process that imprisoned his nephew, the father of the woman. While she had grown up in internment camps after her father was imprisoned, her cousin had grown up in what is called "the block," the restricted area where party officials lived. After our dinner, she told me that, in her opinion, her cousin's work with the prison commemoration project was tantamount to having Hitler's grandson commemorate Dachau.

The story of these cousins, both of whom are personally as well as professionally staked in commemorating Albania's gulag system, illustrates how the poisonous history of a violent regime continues both to rend family relations and prevent people from working together to heal the wounds of the past and productively imagine futures. It is no surprise, then, that the public sphere remains highly polarized, dominated by secrecy, distrust, and fear. Memories of persecution continue to shape private and public life, and, without meaningful ways to mourn the losses that still rend the social fabric,

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society remains locked in a repetition of un-mourned traumatic history (Etkind 2009; Verdery 2007). But, as Eli Zaretsky (2009) insists, "remembering" the crimes of communism requires more than "*commemorating* the dead" (203). Indeed, as many others have pointed out, the politics of commemoration is inevitably imbricated in cultural memory wars (Mark 2014; Olick 2007; Borneman 2011; Rothberg 2009). Political battles are waged by manipulating, distorting, freezing, exaggerating, repressing, denying, mythologizing, and idealizing individual and collective memories of historical events, and cultural groups fragment, polarize, and go to war over these.

Viable *political* progress towards democratization thus requires the socio-cultural work, which is also an individual and collective emotional-psychological work, of critically understanding, synthesizing, and interpreting an as-of-yet un-interpreted history. Effective *policy* will require a more nuanced understanding of the "deep connections between cultural stories, personal stories" and the structures of identity in Albania (Feldman 2001, 287).

**Co-Curricular Activity:**

- International Human Rights Film Festival, September 2013, Tirana, Albania. Featured speaker and workshop leader, "Post-Memory: The Trans-generational Transmission of Trauma." Workshop with 90+ high-school students in conjunction with the International Human Rights Film Festival <http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB8QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ihrffa.net%2F&ei=Ita-U4CFJJPjsATnmoC4Ag&usg=AFQjCNGkiF9Hq2mpvA2r8tpd39etycSD9A&sig2=VejiO4UzSpdrKFlnb21gFw>
- Moderator for Albanian Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Trauma and Torture Round Table on Political Persecution and Memory: Confronting the Past. European University, Tirana, in coordination with the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes, June 2014.
- Coordinator of Working Group on Education Collaborations, US Embassy, Tirana
- Collaborated on English Subtitling for Documentary Film "The Hidden Documentary" <http://fabiankatifilm.co.uk>; screened throughout fall of 2013 and spring of 2014 at the Tirana International Film Festival, the Prishtina International Film Festival, the Organization for Cooperation in Europe, the Societa Geografica and Albanian Embassy, Rome, Italy.

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- Provided Interview with DigitAlb on traumatic memory and identity to introduce premiere of documentary on Albanian television 2 January 2014
- Fulbright Judge, US Embassy Tirana, September 2014
- Frequent lunch meetings and discussions about the situation of the former political prisoners with human rights and democratization officers with the OSCE, UNDP, and local government officials.

**Conclusions:**

Many analysts directly link the failure to address past abuses to the failure of democratic development, particularly in the areas of accountability, transparency, and the rule of law (Davis 2011; ICTJ 2012; Dukalski 2011; IPD 2012). Correspondingly, policy initiatives frequently evolve from the assumption that democratic development requires a complete break from the communist past. But, in societies such as Albania, where political institutions have become entrenched without any significant justice mechanisms, it is not clear how Albanians can meet Western demands to make this clean break with a past that is, in fact, the very fabric of their emotional, epistemological, and ontological relation to self and other. The story of the cousins who were divided by a family history that simplistically draws victim / perpetrator lines illustrates how deeply inscribed this past is in the social, psychological, familial, and topographical landscapes Albanians inhabit, and how necessary it is to return to those pasts in order to work through them. At present, my friend whose great uncle helped to imprison her father cannot find common ground with her cousin, the grandson of a high official in the secret police – despite the fact that both are, from different directions, working towards dealing with the consequences of a history in which so much of the population was brutalized and terrorized. Each holds a different narrative of a past that both links and divides them. In order to be effective, the next stage of human rights work in Albania will require concrete, targeted actions that identify specific points of conflict and intersection (such as with these cousins) and structure opportunities to find the ground-in-common, the habitable space, between them.

After discovering the history that had separated a family line, members of which I had known for some time but had never met, I discussed began talking with both family lines about what it means for the children of these family structures to remain divided over these histories – histories which each side lived, experienced, and remembers very differently. After several months of negotiation, two of

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the family members joined me for dinner and 3 hour discussion of the different versions of the family story they had inherited. They have agreed to continue working with me over the next several months as I draft *Re-Membering in Transition*, during which time we will use our correspondence to reflect on what has divided the families, how we may re-see the past from the point of view of the "other," on what it *means* to enter into conversation with the "other" of a family divided by the victim/ perpetrator story. I hope to use this family's voice – in their own words – as one form of a concrete, targeted action through which Albanians may find their co-habitable space.

**Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications:**

I have been accepted for a summer residency at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, will I will be conducting secondary research for *Re-Membering in Transition* and drafting a prospectus for the book. I intend to draft chapters of the book throughout the 2014 – 2015 academic year, with the goal of obtaining an advance contract for publication by the spring of 2015.

Additionally, I will be presenting work from my research at the National Women's Studies Association Convention in November 2014 and at the Historical Dialogues and Accountability Conference on Memory and Human Rights in Lund, Sweden, December 2014.

I plan to apply for an advanced scholars grant in 2015 to allow me to take a semester off and complete *Re-Membering in Transition* for publication.

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Additional Interview sources:

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- From the United States Embassy, Human Rights Officer Jay Porter; Coordinator, Act Now, Elizabeth Barnhart; Public Affairs Officer, Elizabeth Lewis;
- From the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Head of Human Rights and Rule of Law Fiorentina Azizi;
- From the Delegation of the European Union to Albania, Human Rights Officer Andrea Chalupova;
- From the media: Gjergj Erebera, reporter, Balkan Insight and Gazeta Shqiptar; Muhamed Veliu, journalist, Top Channel journalist; Bledi Mane, reporter, TEMA; Fatos Lubonja, media celebrity and independent social commentator;
- From the Albanian Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Trauma and Torture, Director Adrian Kati and Head of Legal Services Erinda Bllaca;
- From the Albanian Human Rights Group, Director Elsa Balluri;
- From the National Association for Formerly Persecuted People, Director Simon Mirakaj;
- From the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes, Director Agron Tufa;
- From the Anti-Communist Club, President Alfred Pellumbi;
- From the Shkoder Association of Ex-political prisoners, Rikard Malaj; Luigi Malaj; Elnor Dervishi; Fatbardha Coka;
- From the United Nations Development Project Department of Democratic Governance, Program Officer Xhesi Mane;
- From the Socialist Party, Keti Bazhdari, Head of the SP in Shkodra and Leader of the Working Group for ex-political prisoners and formerly persecuted families.
- From the 2012 hunger strike group, Skënder Tufa, Perekli Shqevi; lawyers Astrit Prendi, Bilal Kola, Stefan Topalli



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