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**Differences between the coping mechanisms of people  
who lived in Savër, Lushnja labour camp, between  
the ones who fled after the 1990s and  
the ones who stayed in Albania**

Migena Buka - Rudina Rama - Edmond Rapti -  
Theodhori Karaj - Eralda Zhilla

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CNR - Istituto di Storia dell'Europa Mediterranea  
Via Giovanni Battista Tuveri, 130-132 — 09129 Cagliari (Italy).  
Telefono | Telephone: +39 070403635 / 070403670.  
Sito web | Website: [www.isem.cnr.it](http://www.isem.cnr.it)

## Special Issue

**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



RiMe 14/V n.s. (June 2024)

Special Issue

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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

Migena Buka - Rudina Rama  
Edmond Rapti - Theodhori Karaj  
Eralda Zhilla  
(University of Tirana)

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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.

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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 Camp<sup>1</sup>*

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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)

## Differences between the coping mechanisms

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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### 7. Curriculum vitae

Assoc. Prof. Migena Buka, a key figure in the University of Tirana's Psychology Department, specializes in leadership and human resources within the Social Sciences Faculty. Her work includes collaborations with top Albanian firms like Albtelecom and Bankers Petroleum, and significant projects with GIZ, UNICEF, UNDP, and the EU, marking her impact locally and globally. She actively contributes to academic forums and has a robust research portfolio in human resources management. Contact: [migena.buka@unitir.edu.al](mailto:migena.buka@unitir.edu.al)

Ass. Prof. Rudina Rama – University of Tirana - Contact:  
[rudina.rama@unitir.edu.al](mailto:rudina.rama@unitir.edu.al)

[https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page\\_id=9147](https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page_id=9147)

Prof. Dr. Edmond Rapti – University of Tirana Contact:  
[edmond.rapti@unitir.edu.al](mailto:edmond.rapti@unitir.edu.al)

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[https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page\\_id=9147](https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page_id=9147)

Prof. Dr. Theodhori Karaj – University of Tirana - Contact:  
[theodhori.karaj@unitir.edu.al](mailto:theodhori.karaj@unitir.edu.al)

[https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page\\_id=1904](https://fshs-ut.edu.al/?page_id=1904)

Ass. Prof. Eralda Zhilla – University of Tirana - Contact: [eralda.zhilla@unitir.edu.al](mailto:eralda.zhilla@unitir.edu.al)

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