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

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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

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Special Issue

Face Up. Faces from the past.
The fight for freedom and democracy in Albania
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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.

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