

RE-MEMBERING IN TRANSITION: THE TRANS-NATIONAL STAKES OF VIOLENCE AND DENIAL IN POST-COMMUNIST ALBANIA

Lori E. Amy

(PhD, Associate Professor in the Department of Writing and Linguistics at Georgia Southern University)

Abstract: Albania represents perhaps the most extreme case of isolation and governmental oppression under communist dictatorship in Southeastern Europe. Not surprisingly, the violence of transition in Albania both reflects and in significant ways differs from the violence of transition in other Southeastern European countries. Its relation to the former Yugoslavia, for example – where the Ethnic Albanian populations in Kosova and Macedonia complicate a politics of memory and national identity – both imbricates and distances Albania from the Balkan wars. As a pivotal point in networks moving goods and people throughout the Balkans in the 90s and as a host country for refugee populations, Albania is intimately tied to the material conditions of the wars accompanying transition in the Balkans. Paradoxically, the fact that, within Albania, people do not follow the identity schisms mobilized in the wars remains a source of national pride. This paradox points to a complex nexus of issues surrounding individual and collective memory in post-communist Albania: on the one hand, Albanians retain a strong national identity that is fiercely proud and patriotic, and, on the other, this identity is fragmented, marked by internal conflicts, experienced episodically, lacking an organic structure for integrating experience into sustainable narratives through which the past can be remembered or the future imagined.

These two paradoxes – of the fragmentation of memory and identity that nevertheless has a nationalistic unifying core, and of the violence of transition which contextualizes memories of the past and imaginaries for the future – frame the investigation of memory and identity in this paper. For our analysis, we draw on interviews with two age cohorts: women who were working adults with families under the Hoxha regime, and women who were in or about to enter college when the government collapsed. Following Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the body as a site of incorporated history and Iwona Irwin-Zarecka's delineation of the infrastructure of memory, we are especially interested in understanding how unarticulated, unanalyzed, and unresolved memory contests are manifesting in the culture and politics of transition. Our questions include: How are private memories retained in the face of state violence, and what are the limits of representation in a memory project that seeks to open the discursive space for articulating experiences that have remained unarticulated? Given the un-representability of deep memory (Friedlander), how do memory projects generate memory scaffolds that can bring the past into productive relation to the work of mapping a future? What are the processes through which fractured and fragmented (unarticulated) (oppressive) narratives and constructions of the past are integrated, or, at least, put into

productive relation? This investigation of memory and identity is in the interests of understanding the “socially instituted limits of the ways of speaking, thinking, and acting” constraining Albanians working through this historical moment, and, through this understanding, to offer reflections of use to others similarly situated as they engage in the work imagining trajectories into the future (Bourdieu Language and Symbolic Power 31).

Keywords: Albania, communist dictatorship, national identity, private memories, state violence

In totalitarian societies, especially of the classic Stalinist variety, official denial goes beyond particular incidents (the massacre that didn't happen) to an entire rewriting of history and a clocking-out of the present. The state makes it impossible or dangerous to acknowledge the existence of past and present realities... Denial is thus not a personal matter, but is built into the ideological facade of the state. The social conditions that give rise to atrocities merge into the official techniques for denying these realities – not just to observers, but even to the perpetrators themselves. Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial*

I want to engage a discussion of memory in post-communist Albania through Stanley Cohen's analysis of denial as a function of both personal and state/ideological processes. However, twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we need an expanded understanding of extra-state forces that more adequately accounts for the politics and processes of memory work in transitional societies in which international bodies and shadow economies play such crucial roles. In addition to asking how the state and its representatives structure denial, we have to ask how International players, transnational global flows, and extra-state structures are part of the processes and practices of denial. This is an urgent question for me; as an outsider doing research on post-communist traumatic memory in Albania, I have come to realize that invoking people's memories of communism and transition inevitably invokes memories of state violence, and that these memories involve all of us in a complex web of global socio-cultural, economic, and political power relations.¹

Some of the most obvious relations of power impacting processes and practices of denial evolve from the parallel, often competing, functions of national, international, and extra-state players controlling substantial flows of money. At the formal supra-state levels, this includes the dizzying number of

¹ I have provided a more thorough analysis of the ethical stakes of bearing witness in my article Lori E. AMY, “Listening for the Elsewhere and the Not-Yet: Academic Labor as a Matter of Ethical Witness”, in Naeem INAYATULLAH (ed.), *Autobiographical International Relations: I/IR*, Routledge: London, 2011.

International Organizations such as the UN, EU/ EC, World Bank and IMF, WHO, USAID, OSCE, NATO etc., not to mention the Embassies, cultural/ heritage organizations, and private foundations operating in the country. The global infrastructure of “development”, these organizations impose, through their funding initiatives, international policies, mandates, and legal frameworks within the country. But, as Misha Glenny points out in his analysis of the rise of organized crime in the Balkans in tandem with the break-up of the former Soviet Union, “capitalism had not existed until 1989, and so the hopelessly weak states that emerged throughout the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had simply no capacity to define what was ‘legal’ and what was ‘illegal’”.² In Albania, which had almost completely eliminated private property, there were quite literally *no structures* – no legal frameworks (including private property law and tax codes), no precedents, no existing infrastructure – to aid privatization. In the over-night shift to a market economy, transitional states had to develop *in the absence of* laws and social-political structures, through the competing, contradictory, and enmeshed dynamics of international political and economic forces demanding radical changes by people and institutions ill-equipped to meet those demands.

This is a crucial context for understanding state violence and the processes of denial. Stories of exile, imprisonment, torture, and execution under communism stand side by side with the denials of past *and* present realities upon which “transition”, “market economy”, and “democracy” rely. How, for example, does the language of “freedom” and “democracy” deny the reality of privatization that has left schools and hospitals in devastating conditions, that has abandoned social services, that cannot employ over half of the working-age population in the formal economy? To talk about state violence *then* requires a corresponding discussion of state violence *now*, but, given the transitional state as a site of intersecting and competing global forces, the “state” is not reducible to a simple set of governmental institutions or representatives. Nor can the pervasive feeling of insecurity characterizing life for most Albanians be attributed only to the “state” or “solved” by it. How, for example, can a woman tell a story of a family member who was executed under the communist regime and still say that life was more “secure” then? An analysis of traumatic memory in transition, then, must account as much for the international players and global flows implicated in the structural violences of the present as it does for the state forces structuring the violences of the past.

These structural violences are complex and intersecting, involving the perpetuation of past realities compounded by new realities. For example, as many scholars have noted, the state apparatus in many post-communist nations has, of necessity, been an extension of the old state.³ Courts, schools, city halls,

² See Misha GLENNY, *McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld*, New York: Vintage Books, 2009, p. 15.

³ See especially Maria LOS, “Lustration and Truth Claims: Unfinished Revolutions in Central Europe”, in *Law & Social Inquiry*, Winter 1995, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 117–161; Melissa NOBLES, “The Prosecution of Human Rights Violations”, in *Annual Review of Political Science*, June 2010, vol. 13, pp. 165–182. For an analysis of the stakes of transitional governmentality, see

lawyers, judges, police officers, ministers – in all of its domains, the emerging state relies on the people and institutions responsible for running the old state. To the extent that these are the people and institutions through whom state violence was enacted, they remain sources of insecurity for the general population. But the insecurity of the old order – strict regulation, harsh punishment for infraction – was, for many people, accompanied by the security of the belief, however illusional, that if one obeyed the rules of the state, the state in turn would provide housing, jobs, health care, education, and a minimal standard of living. Disillusioned of the belief that “capitalism” would bring riches and “freedom”, Albanians are now struggling through the harsh realities of transition, realities that are as often as not dis-avowed by organizations and institutions promoting their own economic and ideological agendas. International and extra-state forces, from the World Bank⁴ and UN to organized criminal networks, have their own “official techniques” for denying the current realities of privatization, including problems of corruption, lack of resources for basic needs in health care and education, unemployment, and obstacles evolving the rule of law. Hence, Cohen’s analysis of denial as built into the ideological facade of the state⁵ has to be applied to the ideological work at stake across each of these intersecting domains. Our question thus becomes: how do local, national, international and extra-state forces converge in the processes of denying state violence both *then* and *now*?

AN OPENING VIGNETTE: THE INTERNATIONAL AS FAILED WITNESS AND A GESTURE TOWARDS BEARING WITNESS

In the last week of June 2010, I was involved in an argument about the extent of public executions in Albania. The argument was interesting in part because it occurred at an upscale restaurant in the capital city, Tirana, during an informal dinner including an eclectic group of Albanians working in civil society (artists, journalists, NGO representatives) and Internationals (Embassy staff, scholars, administrators and development personnel). I was describing my surprise to find that, so far, the majority of Albanians I have interviewed about memories of communism and transition have told me a

the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights publication *Rule of Law Tools for Post-Conflict States: Vetting: An Operational Framework*, United Nations: New York and Geneva, 2006, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/RuleoflawVettingen.pdf> (accessed September 5th, 2010)

⁴ See, for example, the International Development Association’s findings of corruption in the World Bank’s demolition of homes in the coastal zones in Jale. Charged with obstructing investigations and falsifying information, the World Bank operated in conjunction with construction police, government officials, and private enterprise to clear land for the purported development of a tourist resort. For more information on the investigation, see Besar LIKMETA, Gjergi ERBARA, “World Bank Demolished Albania Village”, in *Balkan Insight*, 2.02.2009, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/16349/> (accessed June 3rd, 2010)

⁵ See Stanley COHEN, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, pp. 1–20.

story of public execution. A woman working with the OSCE interrupted me and said that, in fact, there were no public executions in Albania – Hoxha did not work that way. She was not disputing that execution itself was a component of the regime; most people understand that Albania had the highest rate of executions of any formerly communist country in the region. The point of dispute was whether or not there were, at any points in the regime, practices of *public* execution.

The impasse we reached was especially interesting as the group of Albanians at our end of the table began a discussion of the public execution most prominent in the cultural memory of people from Tirana: the June 25, 1992 hanging of Ditbardh and Josef Cuko in the main square of the city of Fier, in front of a crowd of people.⁶ This is a particularly interesting example as the Fier execution occurred after transition, under the first democratically elected non-communist government. Even more interesting was the debate amongst the Albanians at dinner that night about the Fier execution: one mid-30s man who remembered the event quite well found the hanging completely justified, while another young man and two women believed the public nature of the execution (where they recollect that the bodies were left hanging in the main square for some time) to have been wrong. The argument that the execution was justified relied upon 1) the clearly heinous nature of the crime (a family of five, including an infant, were bludgeoned to death in the course of a robbery); 2) the firm belief that the victims were in fact guilty of the crime and the hanging was just; 3) the sense that the hanging restored a moral order. In the midst of this discussion of public execution, the OSCE woman maintained that the execution we were describing did not represent Hoxha-regime practices, and that the stories I was getting otherwise must be either exaggerated or fabricated.

As I had just returned from Shkodra, where I was conducting interviews with members of the Association for the Formerly Politically Persecuted following the International Day Commemorating Victims of Communism, I was particularly interested in the International woman's reluctance to credit the profoundly disturbing stories that had emerged from over 20 hours of formal interviews with ten credible interview subjects. Moreover, the fact that the discussion included voices advocating the legitimacy of the execution, which occurred just a few years after transition, indicates that the execution itself fit within existing frameworks of "appropriate" responses to crime. Indeed, when I pushed the conversation further, trying to compare the Hoxha-era stories of execution I had heard in Shkodra with the post-Hoxha after-transition incident in Fier, the small sub-group involved in this conversation agreed that there indeed had been executions in Shkodra which, as the epicenter of resistance to the regime, was most heavily hit by violent repression. People at

⁶ For a detailed account of the execution, see the Amnesty International Report, 26.06.1992, <http://www-secure.amnesty.org/fr/library/asset/EUR11/006/1992/es/b955d86b-ed8f-11dd-95f6-0b268ecef84f/eur110061992en.pdf> (accessed September 26, 2010)

the Tirana dinner confirmed that they had heard, in addition to stories of executions, stories about bodies being drug by barbed wire through the public thorough fare.

The next night, at dinner with a UNIFEM official, I told the story of the previous night's dinner-time argument. I was particularly interested in discovering whether or not the International Community – at least, the small fraction of that community with which I, as a Fulbright Scholar researching post-communist traumatic memory in Albania, am in touch – had encountered stories of public execution, and, if so, what they made of these. The UNIFEM official told this story: at a June 2010 farewell dinner for the out-going Director of the World Bank in Albania, the Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, told a story of a Public Execution in Albania to make the point that we have a traumatic past that has yet to be addressed.

The following week, I returned to Shkodra, where I reported both incidents to Pauli Pero, an historian and Director at the Archive Office for the History Museum of Oso Kuka; Pero has worked with the Archives Office for 32 years. Visibly agitated, he said that public executions in Albania occurred in waves; right after the second world war, in the process of wiping out opposition to the Communist Party and establishing a one-party state under the control of Hoxha; in the 1970s, in response to increased attempts to escape the country, and again in the early 80s, also largely in response to attempted escapes. The degree of public executions varied by region, with the north being most heavily targeted as it was the most resistant to communist rule. In all regions, though, there were combinations of executions, of public shaming of people who had attempted to escape (prisoners paraded through the streets, handcuffed, dead bodies driven by truck or dragged with wire as an example of what would happen to people who tried to flee the country).

While some of the executions were in fact public – hanging, shooting in sight of crowds of people – a semi-public version of night-time executions was perhaps more terror-invoking. Pero reports that, at night, communities could hear the gun shots of the execution squads killing people. The dead bodies were left in the Catholic Cemetery. In the morning, families with loved ones in prison would search the corpses to see if fathers, sons, brothers, mothers, daughters, wives were shot and left for dead. The lucky ones were able to recover the bodies of their dead and give them proper burial. Many were not so fortunate – one of the lingering communist-era traumas still plaguing Albanians is the numbers of dead who were killed and buried in mass and/or unmarked graves, whose bodies have to this day not been recovered or identified, whose families still do not know what happened to them, have not been able to find a body, give it the ceremony of burial, find the narrative to mourn the death and move on.

When he finished talking, Pero said to me: “Tell that to your friend.”

SOME THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

Since this night, I have been asking every international I encounter what s/he knows about the history of public execution in Albania. Except for the

UNIFEM official, one lawyer with a background in human rights, and one woman married to an Albanian man, every international I have so far asked has been surprised to hear that there were public executions.⁷ Conversely, every Albanian of the middle and older generation that I have asked knows something about this history. That is, public execution is part of the collective memory of Albanians with whom I have talked (though a covert memory, not openly discussed) but is not part of the collective memory of Internationals working in the country with whom I am in contact. This difference in memory and the construction of “Albania” and “Albanians” it engenders suggests that, central to the problem of denial, repression, and distortion in memory is the question: Who is producing knowledge about Albania – about the communist past, about people’s experiences and struggles with and through transition? How is the knowledge produced by Albanians, for an Albanian audience, different than the knowledge produced about Albania/Albanians, for an international audience? (This question is equally relevant, though inflected differently, whether it is Internationals, Albanians, or mixed teams producing knowledge for an international audience.)

This radical split between the covert collective memory of many middle and older generation Albanians and Internationals’ knowledge of Albanian history illustrates the stakes of memory work in transition. Some of the theoretical stakes of engaging histories of state violence and denial twenty years after transition, then, include:⁸

⁷ I am well aware that I am using broad brush-strokes to sketch out the parameters of a complex and important dimension of traumatic memory under communism and in transition. Of course, there have to be internationals with a deeper understanding of Albania’s history, and nationals who will tell a different story of that history. My conversations and interviews represent neither methodological rigor nor statistical reliability. As noted in this essay, I was conducting preliminary interviews with a range of subjects available to me, initially, through my work with the Faculties of Medicine and Sociology at the University of Tirana and NGOs working in the sectors of civil society, women’s, and human rights. As I spent a year and a half in Albania, my contacts expanded through participation in conferences, community events, and friendships growing out of personal acquaintances made in the course of daily life. I worked primarily with people and organizations in Tirana and Shkodra, so the very important areas of the south are not represented in my conversations. I thus cite my experience, not to generalize an unsupportable claim to definitive truth, but, rather, to point to some of the gaps in knowledge constructions inhibiting our ability to fully understand the traumatic memories, both past and present, generating competing and contested “truth” claims. I hope that this analysis will help facilitate the systematic, rigorous research we need to better understand the generational as well as international stakes of traumatic memory in Albania.

⁸ For a particularly interesting look at how international narratives were complicit in obscuring state violence against Palestinians in the formation of Israel, see Ariella AZOULAY, “Constituent Violence 1947–1950. A Visual Genealogy of a regime and the transformation of the catastrophe into ‘a catastrophe from their point of view’”, in *Resling* (in Hebrew), 2009, p. 1–14. For the English version of this article see [http://www.zochrot.org/images/violenc%20gallery%202009%20english\].pdf](http://www.zochrot.org/images/violenc%20gallery%202009%20english].pdf) (accessed September 25th, 2010) Azoulay’s analysis of the narrative normalization of what could only be, after the fact, pointed out as a “crime” closely resembles conditions in Albania. As she puts it, “Constitutionally legalized violence – such as looting, expropriation, dispossession and expulsion – was... carried out under state auspices,

1. Much of the knowledge about Albania is produced for and consumed by an international audience in the service of “development”, “aid” and “security”;
2. The language of knowledge production and consumption shapes what can be known, by whom, and for what purposes. Parallel universes exist in which “knowledge” produced and consumed by one group is not available to – and, in many cases, radically different than – “knowledge” produced and consumed by another group.
3. Knowledge produced within Albania is constrained by
 - a. The economic and political realities of under-development in “transition” and a donor-dependent society. In the first place, those Albanians that do have access to the knowledge resources through which they can become producers of knowledge about Albania (education, books, research data, cultural and digital literacies that allow for reflective, comparative analysis) are frequently indebted to sponsoring organizations or working directly for International Organizations (either as paid employees or via NGO-based funded projects). What they can say and how they can say it is thus circumscribed by the political realities in which, in order to secure jobs and project support, they dare not offend donors.
 - b. Access to information is a structural problem at every level:⁹ outdated and badly translated books dominate the scant holdings of public and university libraries; the information explosion of the digital revolution has not yet come to Albania, a poor country still suffering from power outages and lacking a technology infrastructure, where even public universities still do not have reliable internet service or paid subscriptions to research databases; secrecy, corruption, power contests and political wrangling make it extremely difficult to access information from governmental agencies; ongoing infrastructure problems

under another name – evacuation, not expulsion; flight, not deportation; distribution of property, not looting; fair allocation, not dispossession... everything was done openly... But, despite this visibility, the catastrophe didn’t appear as a catastrophe. The terms in which it was described, that sound like those we associate today with the darkest of regimes, didn’t send chills down the spines of those who used them, as they would have had they felt that a catastrophe had occurred. It was only a few years later that these terms began to sound like evidence of a crime.” AZOULAY, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁹ Interestingly, though, this argument about “isolation” must be qualified not just by mass media and telecommunications, which bring the “world” to our living rooms and computer screens, but more importantly by the substantial flow of workers (often undocumented) across borders. Migrant laborers do indeed return with great stores of knowledge and information about the world beyond Albania’s borders, but this information is most frequently labor-market and popular-culture oriented. Moreover, those returning from undocumented work abroad are not in general in the positions inside Albanian society to become producers of “official” knowledge in the service of the state or its institutions.

(lack of a clear addressing system for most homes, for example, that inhibits mail delivery through a postal system) make it extremely expensive to order books from abroad.

- c. Knowledge produced for local entities – governmental institutions, political parties –is frequently politically motivated. Information, manipulated by ideological and political agendas, is often with-held, falsified, and distorted.

As this cursory look at some of the factors constraining knowledge production and consumption in a “transitional” society indicate, any discussion of traumatic history and memory in Albania must account not only for the 50 years of communist isolation and totalitarian repression, but also for the twenty years’ of international forces and flows through which we have come to this present moment and from which we turn our gaze to the past that haunts us. A first, necessary understanding is that we must work our way out of a multi-directional (self)censoring loop in which economic dependency and extreme vulnerability impose limits, first, on what we can know, and, second, on what we can say and to whom about what we have come to know.

Interestingly, this article is a product of the very constraints on knowledge production I have just outlined. It evolved through the course of preliminary interviews I was conducting for a collaborative project investigating the ways that older, middle, and younger generations in Albania remember experiences of traumatic life events. I intended these to help refine the interview protocol for a qualitative research project with my Albanian co-author, a linguist with expertise in discourse analysis. As I am a theorist entering this project through the frames of feminist psychoanalytic theory, specializing in narrative, memory, and trauma studies, I am staked in a theoretical analysis of memory work at the individual and collective levels. From this theoretical frame, I was stunned by the numbers of stories I was getting about public execution and what, in other contexts, would be defined as disappearings, and equally stunned both by the absence of public discourse about these issues within Albania and among Albanians as well as the overall ignorance among the International Community about these issues.

This took my own thinking in a different direction: while these issues of generational experiences of and transmission of traumatic life events, and the ways in which the traumatic affect of these events still haunts the culture, remain important to us, my feeling is that, before proceeding further with a generational analysis of trauma, I need to more carefully trace some broad theoretical stakes of an analysis of traumatic memory in transition in Albania. In addition to the complexities of generational and regional memory and the dynamics between individual/family memories in the private sphere and collective/cultural memories in the public sphere, we have to ask what role a strong International presence and a heavily donor-driven development

process play in determining what kinds of memories are circulated, in what venues, through what mediums, and to what ends.¹⁰

THE ETHICAL OBLIGATION OF INTERNATIONAL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

As Rey Chow importantly notes in the *The Age of the World Target*, anthropological and sociological research in America following the Second World War is deeply imbricated in military and global security nets. Indeed, “area studies” programs in U.S. universities are closely linked to intelligence gathering for strategic military purposes: academic knowledge about a possible “target” is, in the event of war, in the service of military intelligence.¹¹ (The same could be said for the U.S. Fulbright Hays Fellowship on which I am conducting my research in Albania). In addition, attitudes of American Exceptionalism and the endemic problems of a first-world/North voice naming the history/experience of the “other” demand a self-reflective critique. Hence, for any observation I make about Albania, a corresponding observation could be made about America. As Cohen reminds us, “whole societies are based on forms of cruelty, discrimination, repression and exclusion which are ‘known’ but never openly acknowledged” – such as racism in the United States of America (10).¹² As I am an American writing about the experience of hear-

¹⁰ I am particularly indebted to the insight and generosity of spirit of the many interlocutors who gave so much of time and energy to our – often late-night, always intense – discussions. In particular, I would like to thank, in addition to Pauli Pero: Ridvan Troshani, Blendi Gerdoci, Tomar Luzati, Bled Hodobashi, Iza Aci, Sphresa Delija, Violeta Aziz, Elga Mitre, Erenik Pula, Elnar Dervishi, Ndrçim Muhja, Rregina Tornaku, Dardan Krasniqi, Ervin Toci, Klaus and Louise Schmitz, Afet Bela, Nikolin Kola, Tatiana Kurtiqi, Enver Roshi, Gezim Baraku, Bernard Zenelli; my friends to whom I must give a cryptic thank you include Ben, Kozetta, R, Mikki, Sylvia, G, C, K, T, and D. I am indebted to Eni, Inez, Ardita, Oli, Monika, and Ben for translating for me. A special thanks to the participants of the 3rd Post-Yugoslav Peace Academy, Sarajevo, July 2010, and especially to Orli Fridman, for intensive discussions about memory and conflict that sharpened my thinking and added depth to my perspective. My apologies to the many people whose long hours of conversation have helped to shape my thinking but whose names I have left out of this acknowledgement.

¹¹ See Rey CHOW, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Chow’s analysis of the imbrications of academic and military knowledge is exemplified in the United States Military Human Terrain Systems Program (HTS), which embeds anthropologists in military units in Afghanistan and Iraq to gather intelligence and support military operations. For the American Anthropological Associations condemnation of this program, see “AAA Opposes US Military’s HTS Project” at <http://www.aaanet.org/issues/press/Anthropology-and-the-Military.cfm> (accessed September 26, 2010)

¹² While a thorough analysis of the cold war denial is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note, following Cohen, that, globally, “an entire language of denial has been constructed” in the “language of the nuclear arms race: the use of war games analogies and other linguistic tricks to neutralize catastrophe” combines official lying and cultural evasion “in order to evade thinking about the unthinkable.” This “mutual dependency between official and cultural denial” is particularly visible in the mass media coverage of America’s Gulf War

ing Albanians' stories of public execution and insisting on bringing the term "disappeared" to a discussion of the many families searching for information about the location of bodies of relatives killed under the totalitarian regime, it is especially important that I foreground this problem of representation.¹³

It is from this frame of inter/trans-national complicity that I want to grapple with the problem of traumatic memory, and particularly with the problems of repression, distortion, fragmentation, and denial, in Albania. As this article represents preliminary findings from the early stages of an investigation of post-communist traumatic memory and transition, I am not drawing definitive conclusions; rather, I am interested in sketching the parameters of the memory contests still splitting Albania, in posing questions that can yield a deep, phenomenological understanding of how people remember their lives under communism and in transition, and in establishing a solid theoretical foundation from which to continue work that maps the generational stakes of traumatic memory in Albania. One of the most immediate questions for me to pose, then, is: how did I live in Albania for nine months, talking to literally hundreds of people about traumatic memory, without recalling a single articulation of public execution? Did somebody, at some point, make a reference to this that did not register with me? Was it an issue that, from an insider's point of view, was obvious and didn't bear mentioning?

Many people said that, under Hoxha, life was governed by the fear of exile to a village or labor camp, imprisonment, or death. I have notes from many conversations that include the phrase "you could be killed". Like the woman from the OSCE, though, I assumed "you could be killed" meant variations of killing in detention, from death as a result of torture to executions in prisons. I did not connect "you could be killed" to public hangings after which bodies were left for days in public squares, to parading prisoners and corpses through the street as examples of what would happen to enemies of the state, to dragging bodies with barbed wire through public thoroughfares, or to shooting people at night and leaving their bodies for families to recover in the morning. When, in my tenth month, a casual conversation brought up the first reference I remember to public execution, I didn't have a memory scaffolding that allowed me to interpret this information. Over the next weeks, trying to make sense of the information I was getting, I began to bring public execution up in informal conversations as well as formal interviews. Over and over again, people confirmed the occurrence of public executions. I collected personal memories of events people witnessed as well as collective memories from

and the War on Terror, which are a "masterpiece of collusive denial between the producers and reproducers of reality"; to the extent that the public does not really *want* to know more than what is (re)produced for them, we see that cultural denial is "neither wholly private" nor simply "officially organized by the state", Stanley COHEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11.

¹³ I could just as easily be writing about America's War on Terror or torture in Abu Ghraib (which, indeed, I have done – see Lori AMY, *The Wars We Inherit: Military Life, Gender Violence, and Memory*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010.

family and communities. Everybody with whom I talked remembered images of the post-Hoxha Fier hanging.

As I was developing a schema for understanding the stories I was getting about public executions, and what I was coming to understand as “disappearing”, several important themes began to emerge. First, I was responding to and interpreting this information differently than my Albanian friends, colleagues, and interview subjects. What for me was new and extra-ordinary was for them an established feature of their psychic landscape. Though there were differences in the kinds of memories people held (personal, familial, collective), the particular events people remembered (based on region/location and age), and the interpretation of events (based on political party affiliation and positioning under the old regime), every person with whom I spoke confirmed the occurrence of public execution and the fact that, currently, there are people who were killed by the state whose bodies have not been recovered. Nobody with whom I spoke could point me to an English-language source providing a history or analysis of these issues, nor could they point me to archives or publicly available data.¹⁴ Moreover, my use of the term “disappeared” caused some confusion among my Albanian counterparts. In contemporary parlance, “missing” means people who have left after transition and whose family and friends do not know if they made it safely to another country, if they are dead or alive.¹⁵

What is particularly interesting to me, though, is that, while public execution and the disappeared are present parts of the psychic landscape in Albania, there is virtually no public discussion about these matters. While

¹⁴ Several books published in shqip, most either personal memoirs or memory projects by survivors, chronicle their own and others' experience of state violence. See especially Elnar Dervishi's *Harro...* (*Forget...* © Elnar Dervishi, Shkoder 2010) and *Qazim Dervishi: Mësues I Popullit* (*Qazim Dervishi: Teacher of the People*, © Elnar Dervishi, Shkoder 2004) and At Zef Pllumi *Rrno Vetëm për me Treqe* (*I Live Only to Tell*, © Zef Pllumi, Tirana: Shkoder, 2006). These publications are especially important as it is extremely difficult to obtain accurate official information; in the first place, communist-era archives have never been opened to the public, and, in the second, anecdotal evidence suggests that, were the archives opened, researchers would find a host of problems, from large gaps in the record following the destruction of archives to problems with how information was recorded and reported. Currently, community organizations, such as the Associations of the Formerly Persecuted, keep their own data; while these are important sources of information, the lack of a centrally accessible or methodologically uniform database leaves information fragmented and un-integrated. Additionally, the practice of self-publishing in Albania, which is prohibitively expensive, means that most of the books published are produced in small quantities by individuals; these typically are not widely advertised or circulated, and are available, if at all, in only a small number of libraries or book stores.

¹⁵ Interestingly, though, there is a popular television program that tries to find missing persons. “Missing” here is understood as people who disappeared after transition, presumably going illegally to other countries, either voluntarily in search of work or as victims of trafficking. Indeed, the trafficking of women and children from Albania throughout the region has been a serious problem. For a brief overview, see the US State Department's 2010 Report “Trafficking in Persons: Albania” at http://tirana.usembassy.gov/10pr_0614.html (accessed 26 September 2010)

other countries similarly positioned, such as Romania, areas of the Former Yugoslavia, and the former Czech Republic, had protracted public discourse about the “crimes of communism,” Albania seems to have followed a model of silence more closely resembling Spain’s post-Franco pact.¹⁶ Among the many factors influencing this process is, undoubtedly, the prevalence of the old regime’s primary actors in the new government. Those people who retain privately held memories of the violences they have lived tell me, consistently, that they know who ordered them into prison, they know who tortured them, they know who signed the execution order for their loved ones. They can point to individuals, they can say who of these people hold offices now – sometimes high offices, sometimes positions of power. They can tell stories of when they saw the people whose actions they remember in public places – on a visit to the capital city for business; on vacation; randomly, in the streets; daily, as neighbors.

But it is not just the “victims” who know where their “perpetrators” are. A woman holding a high position in a government institution told me that, several years ago, after receiving a professional service, the man treating her told her: I am the one who was assigned to spy on your father. Though her father had gone to prison, the man confessing to her said: “Your father was a good man. I could find no word against him.” For all of those years, he had lived with the memory of his actions, with the knowledge that people whose lives he had affected were living around him. What does it take for him to say: I was the one assigned to spy on your father? What moves him? When he speaks, what does it take for her to *hear* him. To hear that he is a human,

¹⁶ For more information about this see Helen Graham’s excellent analysis of memory repression, distortion, and resurgence in “Coming to Terms with the Past: Spain’s Memory Wars” in *History Today*, May 2004; 54: 5, pp. 29–31. The case of Spain is a useful counterpoint for thinking about extrajudicial execution and the disappeared in Albania. Republican families, afraid of state reprisals, often “concealed the violent deaths” of family members from children and extended family in order to protect them from further state violence. While not exactly like experiences in Albania, there are similarities in the absence of a “public space to mourn those killed by the... regime”, in the “silent knowledge” that produced “a devastating schism between public and private memory” (30). Post-Franco, the fact that those responsible for state violence were ranking members of the new political order and the fear of reopening old wounds and unleashing another civil war led to a “pact of silence”; the political parties agreed that there would be no public naming or investigation of state violence, no truth commission or lustration laws, and that nobody would be held accountable for state violence under Franco. Interestingly, the 2007 Law on Historical Memory, passed over 30 years after Franco’s death in 1975, offers one possible model for Albania; the law provides for declarations of reparation and personal recognition for victims of persecution, violence, sentences or sanctions during the Spanish Civil War and Dictatorship as well as access to Civil Register books for consultation of death certificates. For more on this, see the Spanish Ministry of Justice at http://leymemoria.mjusticia.es/index_en.html (accessed 26 September 2010). Evolving out of the work of Associations asking for the exhumation of mass graves and the identification and return of bodies, Spain’s experience indicates that, indeed, memory cannot remain indefinitely repressed in civil society.

with his own conscience, his own anguish. With the memory of his actions to live with.

This story raises several crucial issues that I believe we need to take very seriously. The first is the problem of a simple, binary understanding of “victims” and “perpetrators.” The second is the complicity of ordinary people in the operation of state violence and the processes of denial through which the systems and structures of violence are affirmed and maintained. Linked to this is an analysis of re-membling in transition that moves us beyond simple notions of “guilt” to a more nuanced understanding through which, collectively, we might acknowledge both past suffering and the complex role of intra- and extra-state forces in denials of both past and contemporary forms of social and cultural violence.

CONFRONTING PASTS, IMAGINING FUTURES

As Hoffman argues in her analysis of memory wars in the Czech Republic “a polarized climate promotes the hunt for scapegoats, especially in a society in which the Communist movement was not imposed from the outside, but came from within” (126).¹⁷ It is easy to point to certain acts – torture or public execution, for example – and name them as “evil”, to define a victim and a perpetrator to hold accountable. But when we trace the structures through which the state-making acts of repression, oppression, imprisonment, torture, and execution were enacted and maintained, the line between “victim” and “perpetrator” blurs. As Tzvetan Todorov explains in his analysis of totalitarian regimes, all citizens are complicit with the functioning of the state. When – as in Albania – communism has been envisioned as the liberation of the country, the effects of independently choosing a political system that then indoctrinates citizens with an ideological belief in the state’s actions as “right” makes individuals both identify with the authority of the state and complicit its actions.¹⁸ As one middle-generation woman put it, she was a “true believer” in communism. She was educated to believe that the people in prison were enemies of the state, that they were getting the proper education so that they could be better citizens and fight for Albania, the greatest nation and the defender of equality and justice. It was not until the early 1990s, when she met a man who had been imprisoned and talked to him about his experience that she began to understand that many people had been political prisoners subject to state violence.

The problem of defining communist-era crimes and achieving a sense of justice is extremely important and complex and one that has received better

¹⁷ See Birgit HOFMANN, “Don’t talk to communists: The Instrumentalisation of the communist past in the Czech Republic’s Political Crises of 2006”, in Sabine FISCHER, Heiko PLEINES (eds.), *Crises and conflicts in post-socialist societies: The role of ethnic, political, and social identities*, Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2008.

¹⁸ See Tzvetan TODOROV, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1996.

scholarly attention than I can give to it here.¹⁹ My interest, however, is in the theoretical and therapeutic, not the juridical, dimension of memory work at the individual and the collective levels. As such, I am interested in thinking about an individual event as a smaller part of larger systems, processes, and structures, and to engage in memory work that both situates events in this larger context and self-consciously (and conscientiously) undertakes the project of remembering in the service of productively aiding the collective good of the present and future. To this end, I find Cohen's analysis of the bystander and the process of denial a useful way of thinking beyond the binary (and consequent polarization) of victim-perpetrator. To the extent that discussions of state violence are silenced/repressed because they imply notions of crime, perpetrator, guilt, and punishment, a focus on the bystander – the ordinary citizen, the complicit machinery through which violence occurs – allows us the possibility of acknowledging the violence that must be collectively recognized in a way that allows us, culturally, to accept responsibility for the pasts that haunt us and move more freely into a future that works out of the shackles of the past we have been trailing. It is thus the role of the bystander and the importance of acknowledging violence to which I want to turn my attention.

As Cohen argues, violence within a culture is generally known to some degree. "Information circulates – neighbors witness disappearances or kidnappings, torture victims return to their families, newspaper readers know exactly what was censored" (19). At the same time, fear keeps people silent and becomes the fabric of collective denial. If the perpetrator is your own government – and especially a government that you endorsed – fear and denial are even more pronounced. The knowledge of violence that is simultaneously repressed touches on the "Identity and political role" of the individual. As Cohen says:

You are not responsible for the atrocities – you may be an opponent of the government or even a potential victim. But this is your country... And doing something about your own country asks more of you, that you pay especially the price of standing up against the consensus: ostracism, isolation and stigmatization as a "traitor". You may even risk becoming a victim yourself.²⁰

¹⁹ For an interesting read on the UN's early 1990s response to the problem of extrajudicial executions see the United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights December 1992 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Question of the Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms at <http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/9350254955675d9f8025678b00442b24?Opendocument> (accessed 5 September 2010). For expanded context on Truth Commissions following war, see particularly Victor PESKIN, *International Justice in Rwanda and the Balkans: Virtual Trials and the Struggle for State Cooperation*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. See also Lavinia STAN, "The vanishing truth? Politics and memory in post-communist Europe", in *East European Quarterly*, December 2006, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 383–409.

²⁰ Stanley COHEN, *op. cit.*, p.19.

These dynamics play out, of course, within the context of the official denials that maintain the legitimacy of the state.

If we think of the *processes* at stake in both violence and denial and not simply in terms of specific acts (where we can understand specific acts of violence or denial as end points in processes through which systems and structures are maintained) – then can we find the way to collectively face the past that lurks so close to the surface yet remains un-articulated in our cultural consciousness? As Cohen argues, “coming to terms with the past’ becomes an urgent, fateful question when regimes change after periods of state terror and repression.”²¹ How the government confronts histories of violence, how these are uncovered, recovered, and represented, whether or not previously covered-up and denied information will be made public – these have been crucial issues for this region. Unlike other countries that have had versions of truth commissions or enacted lustration laws, Albania has not opened communist-era archives, has not pursued legal action against people for crimes committed under communism, and has not initiated any large-scale investigations of the communist past. While many might hope that, over time, people will simply forget these things, people’s private memories remain intact: “private knowledge” must be “officially confirmed and enter into the public discourse, if it is to be acknowledged” and transformed from poisonous knowledge that impedes the progress of the state to productive knowledge through which futures can be imagined.²²

PRACTICES OF MEMORY

Certainly, Albania still confronts the problem of how to publicly name the communist past, of how to reconcile the abuse, oppression, and continued emotional presence of state violence with the fact that the power elite of that past remain the power elite of the present.²³ But it is *as crucial* to ask: what international/ transnational forces work to repress and deny living memories of a past that needs to be acknowledged? How do these forces enact ideological processes of denial of *contemporary* forms of violence? I believe that we have to tell these stories, that we have to find the way to hear what has not been culturally representable about violences inflicted by the state – the old state, the emerging state, the multiple inter-trans-extra state forces at work in state structures. How we tell these stories, though, matters – it matters that we tell the stories in a historical context that connects the specific violences about which we speak to the larger, structural violences out of which they emerge and to which they lead. It matters that we insist on identifying the transnational/global flows (and the processes of

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Birgit HOFMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

denial built into their ideological frames) out of which our current relations of power emerged.

In concrete terms, this means asking questions like: how did the 1992 sanctions on the Former Yugoslavia practically demand the formation of smuggling networks, and how have the economies of the former Soviet-bloc formed through the savage economics of a global capitalism that is increasingly showing itself morally – as well as, in the case of so many recent collapses, financially – bankrupt? Glenny goes so far as to argue that “virtually overnight, the vote at the UN Security Council ordering sanctions created a pan-Balkan mafia of immense power, reach, creativity, and venality.”²⁴ States bordering the former Yugoslavia suffered severe economic losses by having their trading routes through Yugoslavia blocked; “the only way they could pay pensions, wages, and health care was by allowing the mob to shore up its control” of the blocked trading routes, creating a “symbiotic relationship between politics and crime.”²⁵ For poor countries scrambling to get into the world economy, war also meant economic opportunity. Quoting a US Intelligence report about Albania, Misha Glenny notes that, in Albania,

oil was shipped via pipeline across the northern border [to Serbia], by boat across Lake Shkoder, by caravans of cars with extra fuel tanks added, by donkeys carrying barrels of oil across mountainous regions... the total oil flow was estimated to have brought Albania more than \$1 million per day during 1993–1994.²⁶

My point here is a simple one: large numbers of international players are staked in the relations of money and power structuring the economic and political landscape of Albania; these interested parties have played roles in supporting power structures in the country and continue to play a role in determining how the past and present of violence and oppression can be discussed. To address the traumatic past of communism and the traumas present in transition, then, requires confronting the complex web of repressions, distortions, and denials at stake in the political, economic, and social institutions and processes of globalization at work in “transition”. To return, then, to Cohen’s argument that denial is an ideological function of the state, we have to place at least three parallel apparatuses of money, power, and control alongside each other: the formal “state” and state structures (courts, police, governmental offices and institutions); international bodies (UN, NATO, OSCE, Embassies, etc.); Extra-state/ extra-legal entities (organized crime, transnational corporations, myriad “gray” economy enterprises and activities). And we have to analyze these structures, not simply in terms of victim and perpetrator, crime and punishment, but, crucially, in terms of bystanders and complicity. Most crucially, I believe we must do this *in*

²⁴ Misha GLENNY, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

²⁵ *Ibidem.*

²⁶ Quoted in *Ibidem*, pp. 31–32.

the interests of being able to openly acknowledge the violences cutting across our social fabric, *with the aim* of creatively re-imagining the terms of our relation.

Lori E. Amy

loriamy@gmail.com

Associate Professor, Department of Writing and Linguistics

Georgia Southern University

PO Box 8026

Statesboro, GA 30461

lamy@georgiasouthern.edu

<http://personal.georgiasouthern.edu/~lamy/>