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Reconstructing the past in a state-mandated historical memory institute: the case of Albania

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ABSTRACT

Legitimisation strategies of post-Communist regimes are interlinked with practices of addressing their non-democratic past. Specific state-mandated institutes emerged in post-Communist countries to create an institutionalised historical memory of the Communist dictatorship. The institutional model of a historical memory institute is characterised by organisational hierarchies, layered institutional practices, and bureaucratic features. This model was implemented in most countries, including Albania. However, the Institute for the Study of the Crimes and Consequences of Communism ('The Institute') in Albania exhibits a different practice of historical reconstruction. The main questions asked by this article are: What has conditioned the distinct approach the Albanian Institute had adopted in its reconstruction of the past? And how can the institutionalisation of a particular social memory in a state-mandated institution be explained? The research is based on ethnographic fieldwork at the Institute. To understand the specific practice of historical reconstruction, the data collected includes semi-structured interviews with leading heads of the Institute, and collected testimonies. Discourse analysis is used to interpret the data.

KEYWORDS

Historical memory institute; reconstruction of the past; symbolic capital; cultural past; restorative memory

1. Introduction

The institutional practice of addressing the past of a Communist regime has varied across the post-Communist countries in which historical memory institutes were established, such as the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes in the Czech Republic, the National Remembrance Institute in Poland, and the Institute for the Study of the Crimes and Consequences of Communism (*Instituti i Studimeve për Krimet dhe Pasojat e Komunizmit*) (ISKK) in Albania, hereafter ('the Institute'). The establishment of the Institute was officially endorsed by the centre-right Democratic Party. It was expected to garner, by law and in practice, all the symbolic power of a state institution and to attain unrestricted access to the Communist secret police archive. In terms of formal institutional features and expected symbolic power, the Institute was to have the same effects as analogous institutions. Established in 2010 and located in the same building that used to be the seat of the representative of Fascist Italy in Tirana, the Institute has focused on collecting the

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testimonies of the politically persecuted, presenting visual reconstructions of internment camps, and publishing a database of victims.

Like most similar institutions in post-Communist East Central Europe ('ECE'), the Institute emerged as a 'politically motivated memory project' (Kopeček, 2013, p. 9; see also Mark, 2010). These state-mandated institutions emerged in the context of mounting opposition to the narrative of regime transitions, in which right-wing anti-Communist parties, which considered the extrication from Communist dictatorship in 1989 to be an incomplete rupture, played a part (Bunce, 2003). What is notable about these institutions is their attempt to create an official historical reconstruction of the past (Kopeček, 2013; Mark, 2010; Mink, 2017). The regime transitions and self-limited revolutions of 1989/90 were discarded and replaced by a political intention to complete an unfinished revolution (Mark, 2010, p. xiv).

Unlike other institutions, the Albanian Institute did not become a complex bureaucratic institution nor did it produce a dominant historical narrative that resonates with the post-Communist social formation. Rather, it institutionalised a social memory of a particular social group, which remained repressed during the Communist dictatorship and the post-Communist period.

This article aims to understand and explain which representations of the past prevail in the institutional discourse. What has conditioned the distinct approach the Albanian Institute has adopted in its reconstruction of the past? How can the institutionalisation of a particular social memory in a state-mandated institution be explained? The reconstruction of the past by the Albanian Institute conveys the social memory of those who were formerly members of the bourgeoisie and who were politically persecuted during the regime.

This article is organised as follows. First, a theoretical section delineates the conceptual and analytical frameworks used. A methodology section follows. The data will then be analysed according to the frameworks described. Finally, a conclusion will describe the main findings and suggest further research.

2. Theoretical framework

Addressing the Communist past is part of the process of social closure and post-Communist regime legitimisation. Scholars of transitional justice emphasise as central the distinction between 'the perpetrator/victim and the criminal/non-criminal dimensions of transitional justice' (Pettai & Pettai, 2015, p. 14), with the intention to '[reconstruct] the normative relation of the individual to the [liberal] political order' (Teitel, 2002, pp. 168–169). As political science scholars and historians of post-Communism argue (Bernhard & Kubik, 2014; Kopeček, 2013), across ECE, the process of transmitting a certain memory of past regimes involved a cultural struggle, where the liberal normative shift was questioned in the name of completing the unfinished revolution. The emergence of historical memory institutes occurred precisely at this juncture. Hanson (2017, p. 335) captures the condition of the absence of shared legitimisation in the post-Communist political order by indicating its lack of 'symbolic forms of social closure'. The presence of a shared social closure is defined as a central 'mechanism in the creation of a social order' (2017, p.335), which marks 'a transition from one regime to another' (p. 331). The discursive and institutional practices of these institutes, as Mink (2017, p. 1014) says, point to 'a deliberate construction of a combined place of memory' focused on methods of 'how to transmit memory of what the Communist regime was like'. The

absence of shared memory of the Communist past and the challenge to the regime change narrative indicate the unstable nature of the legitimization of the post-Communist political order, including Albania.

There were already fewer liberal dissidents who had participated in organised dissent under the Communist dictatorship in defence of human rights, rule of law and consensus politics (Cohen & Arato, 1992; Joppke, 1995; Renwick, 2006) by the time the memory project took shape (Kopeček, 2011), and the dissidents were replaced by anti-Communist mavericks. Mainstream centre-right parties adopted an anti-Communist ideology. The main Albanian centre-right party, the Democratic Party, did the same. However, during regime change this party promoted human rights, reconciliation and the rule of law. On the other hand, the representatives of the institutions in other ECE countries were either professional historians or anti-Communist bureaucrats, appointed due to their ties with the post-Communist political elite in power, or public intellectuals with liberal political leanings. A different conceptual framework is required when examining the Institute in Albania due to differences in the underlying attitudes towards the Communist dictatorship and in the social origin of the representatives of the Institute and the post-Communist ruling elite. The notion of cultural past is taken from the Bourdieusian framework of social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). The concept of cultural past is defined, in this article, as ‘past acquisitions’ (1979, p. 13) objectified by ‘the dispositions inherited from the original milieu’ (1979, p. 14), which are validated, changed or disqualified in interaction with the Communist dictatorship.

The institutional discourse on the country’s Communist past is socially and politically determined in the case of Albania. Through the use of the notion of cultural past and social origin, this article distinguishes between the groups that claim to have a stake in the reconceptualisation of the past and legitimization of the post-Communist political order. The post-Communist political elite, which in the case of Albania consisted of the cultural intelligentsia of the Communist dictatorship, such as university professors, researchers and artists, and of the technocratic intelligentsia such as economic planners, is one group that has an interest in the project. The politically persecuted community, which can be divided into two groups, is another group that has a stake in the reconceptualisation of the past. The main group, which dominates the Institute, comprises successors to the educated middle class and privileged pre-Communism gentry families. In interwar Albania, the Western-educated middle classes constituted the ‘social base of the modernising nationalism’ (Pula, 2008, p. 572). Traditional anti-Communism sentiment was displayed by both gentry families and educated middle classes. ‘The traditional Albanian political elite’ (Meta & Frashëri, 2018, p. 12) stemmed from these social classes. The Communist Party considered the traditional political elite to be political opponents, deporting and interning their families (Meta & Frashëri, 2018, p. 22). This categorisation, albeit not official and explicit, by the regime was transformed into a trope, termed *political families*, by the politically persecuted members of the pre-Communist ruling elite. The second group of the politically persecuted community include anti-Fascists of the left, who initially held of Communist beliefs, and members of the party bureaucracy and technocratic or cultural intelligentsia of the regime’s nomenklatura, who were purged and persecuted in several waves.

The anti-Communist tradition referred to in this article stems from the interwar anti-Communist thinking associated with members of the pre-Communist bourgeoisie

(Chamedes, 2016). This ideology sought to preserve cultural traditions corrupted or rejected under state socialism (Joppke, 1995, p. 215). The interwar experiences of this group of people became a shared cultural past among members of the 'former propertied bourgeoisie' (Eyal, Szelenyi, & Townsley, 1998, p. 27) and the educated middle classes who faced persecution and exclusion under the Communist dictatorship (Mark, 2005, p. 964).

The post-Communist social formation did not bring about a dominant economic class, namely the bourgeoisie, which would have legitimised the democratic system of government in economic terms (see also: Eyal et al., 1998; Ost, 1993, p. 461). The educational policy of the Communist regime hindered the accumulation of cultural capital by members of the pre-Communist upper-class (Hanley & Treiman, 2004, p. 240). This article subscribes to the dominant view in the state socialism literature, namely, that a Communist regime produced a status society. During the late socialism period, cultural capital was valorised to a greater extent than the political capital (Eyal et al., 1998, p. 19) and an intra-elite differentiation appeared within the Communist ruling estate (see: Eyal, 2000; Jowitt, 1992), among the cultural intelligentsia, technocratic intelligentsia and the party bureaucracy. Those who 'accumulated social prestige under communism' (Eyal et al., 1998, p. 36) and then became part of the post-Communist cultural and political elite are described as inheritors of the past regime by the formerly politically persecuted. In this article, inheritors are defined as those who attained positions of power following the regime change due to their symbolic capital. To contrast, the formerly politically persecuted did not possess symbolic capital in the case of Albania.

Representatives of other institutes, used the symbolic power of the state and the 'state-produced historical record' (Chari & Verdery, 2009, p. 24), namely archive materials, as key resources in facilitating the reconstruction of the past (Mink, 2017, p. 1024). Conversely, the testimonies of the politically persecuted (Mark, 2010, p. xxiv) have become central to the Albanian Institute as it reconstructs the past through this social memory. The representatives of the Albanian Institute had no political capital with which to avail themselves due to their distance from the political elite; nor did they succeed in taking advantage of the symbolic power of the state, which was being challenged by other state units and organisations.

3. Methodology

The methodological framework of this article consists of a qualitative case study (Gerring, 2007) with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and ethnographic fieldwork. The case study centres on the role of the Institute's main agents, their positions in the bureaucratic field, their relation to post-Communist social configuration, and the Institute's actual practices. This framework has been formulated to address the following questions: What has conditioned the distinct approach the Albanian Institute has adopted in its reconstruction of the past? How can the institutionalisation of a particular social memory in a state-mandated institution be explained?

The qualitative data was collected during iterative rounds of ethnographic fieldwork in 2013–2015 at the Institute. Semi-structured interviews with leading Institute representatives and non-institutional actors were conducted. All participants are anonymous; the names used are pseudonyms. Fieldwork research has been crucial in observing the practices of the leading members of the Institute when interacting with the *déclassé*

community. In this respect, ethnographic research has permitted the observation of the porous boundaries between the 'assumed' bureaucratic institutional sphere and the social sphere.

The Albanian Institute predominantly reconstructs the past by creating a narrative through the use of the experiences of those who were politically persecuted during the Communist dictatorship. Its reconstruction is characterised by discursive intertextuality. This set of data includes memoirs, personal narratives, and the diaries of the politically persecuted individuals, predominantly from *political families*, which were produced before the Institute's establishment, valorised and later reprinted by the Institute. This material had an important role in transmitting the social memory of persecuted *political families*, hitherto marginal in the post-Communist public sphere. These family narratives date back to the polarisation between Albanian anti-Communist nationalists and Communists during the Second World War (WWII). The collection of oral history interviews with the survivors of the Communist dictatorship are an important resource for the Institute in the reconstruction of the past. This collection was published by the Institute, as organisation author, under the title *Zërat e Kujtesës (Voices of Memory)* in separate volumes from 2014 to 2017. All the witnesses were credited with their full names. Henceforth, I refer to their full names, when analysing texts from this collection. This particular collection details the lived experiences of oppression, memories of life under the Communist dictatorship, and personal perspectives from the politically persecuted. Intertextual traces in the institutionalised social memory refer back to representations of the past and narratives of oppression that the official newspaper *Liria* – founded around 1990 by the Association of the Politically Persecuted – familiarised the public with in the early 1990s.

Social practices, the role of actors and the representation of the past are entangled with the ideational and evaluative functions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 103) of the discursive formation. A qualitative research methodology is warranted in order to understand the Institute's role with regard to broader social and political processes, in which the institutional practices of addressing the Communist dictatorship take place. Discourse analysis is also useful in highlighting the subject positions (Fairclough, 1989, p. 64) of the Institute's representatives as *organic intellectuals* (Forgacs, 2000, p. 300) of the politically persecuted community. The Institute's main representatives share the same cultural past as the descendants of *political families*. The political nature of the processes of addressing the Communist past and the existence of different cultural pasts in the post-Communist political order make discourse analysis a suitable methodology with which to address this sensitive phenomenon.

Contrary to the expected reliance on the symbolic power of the state, which the Institute's representative do not possess, the Institute's discursive reconstruction legitimises the authenticity of the personal narratives through the social practice of affect (Wetherell, 2013, 2015). As *organic intellectuals* among the *déclassé* community, the Institute's representatives use the social practice of 'being affected' (Wetherell, 2015, p. 8) within their institutional context by valorising the cultural past of the politically persecuted and highlighting their current status as afflicted. Contrary to the theoretical expectation of institutional isomorphism and use of the institutional legacy of the past regime (the archive) as a resource (Mark, 2010; Mink, 2017), the reconstruction of the past utilises affect as a mediating mechanism.

The key unit, constituting the micro-level of analysis, or what Fairclough terms as 'the discursive event' (1989, p. 56), is the text, which, in this article, includes texts from the

Voices of Memory collection, semi-structured interviews, reprinted memoirs, and official reports of the Institute. This article incorporates the three dimensions of discourse analysis by linking the analysis of the text with an interpretation of the text by societal actors and by the researcher involved in the process of text production. The process of text production is influenced by the institutional or social conditions in which the discursive formation of reconstruction is produced (Fairclough, 1992, p. 71).

In order to demonstrate the variety of the discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 168), I include texts from the memoirs of those individuals who supported the Communist ideology as a means for social transformation in post-war Albania. These individuals occupied leading positions in the party, or nomenklatura positions within the Communist technocratic or cultural intelligentsia in the 1970s. They were persecuted in the later stages of the Communist dictatorship. A limitation of the data collection process is the relatively small number of qualitative interviews possible with middle-level employees of the Institute, most of whom declined to be interviewed due to deference to higher authorities there. As scholars of ethnographic fieldwork note, interviews cannot replace the ethnographic participant observation of 'socially organised action' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 169). Therefore, the observation of the interaction between the witnesses and the representatives of the Institute in the process of discursive production through oral history interviews is lacking.

4. Reconstructing the past: recollections of family narratives from traditional pre-communist elites

This section presents the analysis of the reconstruction of the past by the representatives of the Institute. This reconstruction is based on the narrative of the lived experiences of the *déclassé* community under the dictatorship. The cultural past, conveyed through transmission of family narratives, has become a resource of the institutional discourse. This part of the article delineates the social and the institutional context in which processes of discursive production and interpretation take place. The first subsection focuses on the solidarity of the *déclassé* community under conditions of violence and oppression. The subjectivities of the politically persecuted and their relation to the Communist dictatorship are explained in the second subsection. The third subsection centres on the position of the politically persecuted with regard to the post-Communist social formation and the inheritors of the past regime. The final subsection addresses the restorative memory constructed by the Institute.

4.1. Solidarity of the downtrodden

The Institute has considered the testimonies of what it terms the survivors of the Communist dictatorship to be rather important, with regard to reconstructing the past. In the preface of the first volume of *Voices of Memory*, the Institute's representative highlights the particular significance of this collection by indicating that 'This category [of testimonies] is a fundamental source of information regarding the history of Communism in Albania, a part of history which is not legitimised and written yet' (ISKK, 2014, p. 7). The discursive practices dominant within the Institute and the discursive representations of the Communist past are marked by intertextuality, methods from previous social practices

of narrating life under the dictatorship, and claims to involvement in the reconstruction of the past. The personal experiences of the politically persecuted are discursively produced with an aim that is two-fold. Firstly, the aim is to 'remove from oblivion' (personal communication, 24 December 2013), as Barid, a 50-year-old male with an education in art and humanities and a leading representative of the Institute, says, the lived experience of the politically persecuted under the dictatorship. Secondly, the objective is to reconstruct the past as a counter-history to official history writing, based on their pre-Communist traditional bourgeoisie family background. Therefore, personal experiences of the dictatorship and the historical reconstruction of the past through the transmission of social memory within *political families* constitute the Institute's two main discursive methods of addressing the Communist past.

The lived experiences of one particular politically persecuted group under the Communist dictatorship reveal the solidarity of the downtrodden forged during the period of persecution and social exclusion. The main theme of these accounts of life under the past regime is one of suffering and negative social stigma. However, there is a variability of experiential discourse in the personal narratives, some of which convey an experience of socialism through the recollection of Communist commodities and lifestyle. The narratives provided by witnesses belonging to families of educated middle-class origin and the propertied class before the Communist takeover show the gradual weakening of the symbolic capital of the gentry and middle classes, which were formerly at the top of the Albanian social pyramid. After WWII, the Albanian Communist Party persecuted, uprooted and demoted the pre-WWII ruling elite, who were considered to be collaborators with the Fascist occupation.

4.2. Personal narratives of moral rectitude when facing communist oppression

In narrating their personal experiences under the dictatorship, the formerly politically persecuted present a particular subject position and identity with regard to the past regime. The discursive construction of their identity is relationally dependent on the depiction of the Communists as being their polar opposite and on other politically persecuted groups who did not have the same pre-Communist social origin and the same anti-Communist political ideology. The second politically persecuted group consists of those who participated in WWII on the side of the partisans in support of Communism and, after the war, occupied positions in the party or the state but were demoted and persecuted during party purges. Contrasting their subject position as persecuted regime functionaries with those who were persecuted due to their earlier political engagements and social class, these narrative authors describe their identity as morally courageous and principled, with their righteousness untainted by their collaboration with the repressive Communist state.

Klora Mirakaj, who was a member of the middle class social prior to Communist rule, stresses the moral integrity of this politically persecuted group when contrasting herself to the Communists, saying, 'I am not a communist forging false testimonies to imprison people' (Instituti i Studimeve për Krimet dhe Pasojat e Komunizmit [ISKK], 2017, p. 194). The recollections of family memories are conveyed in a way that places the identity of the politically persecuted within the cultural and political tradition of the pre-Communist social structure, characterised by loyalty to the fatherland rather than ideologies or party dogma, prior to the Communists' rise to power (ISKK, 2017, p. 195). Prelë Syku, a property

owner and member of a wealthy family before the end of WWII, describes his experience during persecution and imprisonment as being rooted in principled opposition to 'the Communists' – an ideological label used by the politically persecuted to refer to their political opponents since WWII – even under coercion (ISKK, 2017, p. 327). Most of the personal narratives express the irreconcilable us/them contrast in direct speech, as with Prelë Syku: "We are not like you" – I told him' (ISKK, 2017, p. 328). Some use irony to show their moral integrity when facing the officials of the party-state regime. Bedri Çoku, who came from a wealthy nationalist family, does not depict the secret police, Sigurimi, as a ruthless coercive state apparatus. He reports the words of Sigurimi officers: 'We have kept your arrest secret, and no one knows that you have been arrested; we keep you here secretly' (ISKK, 2016, p. 52). Çoku's response to this situation was: 'I was laughing because I thought I was part of a movie, in which I was the main character or hero and they were the ones praying to me' (ISKK, 2016, p. 52).

A consistent feature of the discourse of the politically persecuted on their past experiences is the relational dimension of their discursive construction; they distinguish between their nationalist, anti-Communist and conservative identity, and the identities of members of the Communist technocratic intelligentsia or party bureaucracy who were persecuted by the dictatorship. This particular distinction has implications for understanding the nature of the Communist regime and the reconstruction of the past during the post-Communist period. The oppression and persecution of the 'old anti-Communists and their real anti-Communist sons' (ISKK, 2017, p. 93) during the Communist dictatorship is represented as intrinsically linked to their pre-Communist social origins and worldviews. Some of the individuals who suffered social exclusion and persecution mention that they became politically aware of their subjectivity in relation to the regime due to this experience: 'We are suffering because we are anti-communists, because my father was a National Front [anti-Communist conservative party active during WWII] supporter, and an honest and wealthy man' (ISKK, 2017, p. 23). The Institute, in its conferences and commemorations, whose texts are collected in an almanac, highlight the anti-Communist profile of the victims and resistance (ISKK, 2011, p. 5). In contrast, those who became victims of persecution as members of the party bureaucracy or Communist intelligentsia were described by representatives of the first wave of political persecution as 'accidentally imprisoned' (ISKK, 2017, p. 74), or as not facing their persecution with dignity and courage, due to their collaboration with the secret police under coercion. The Communists and regime functionaries are depicted by the politically persecuted from *political families* as ignorant, treacherous, vile and greedy.

4.3. The dispossessed and the inheritors in the post-communist social formation

After the regime change, the politically persecuted demanded, as they framed it in their daily press, a 'Communist Nuremberg'. The trials of members of the high echelons of the Communist regime in the early 1990s revealed past financial abuse, including personal embezzlement (Teitel, 2002). The role of trials in addressing the past was rather limited. In 1995, the Democratic Party initiated what it called the Anti-Genocide Law, aiming to punish those who had allegedly committed crimes against humanity. The Anti-Genocide Law and the law on the 'Verification of Public Officials and Other Persons related to the Protection of the Democratic State', established in 1995, aimed to weaken the ex-Communist Socialist Party by barring some of its members from participating in elections. The

initial attempt at creating a process of reconciliation, considering citizens as co-sufferers and co-accomplices of the past regime, did not bear fruit.

The process of addressing the past of the Communist dictatorship and of providing a normative shift to a liberal political order in the mid-1990s became politicised and was discontinued after the state crisis of 1997. The initial mechanisms of coping with the Communist past did not permit access to the secret police archive. A persistent dimension of addressing the Communist past in the case of Albania is the legal recognition and acknowledgement of the suffering of the politically persecuted, including an ongoing process of attributing and awarding financial compensation. Addressing the plight of the politically persecuted by the state institutions and members of the dominant political and cultural elite has meant addressing a social problem.

The expressive dimension of the discourse produced by the formerly politically persecuted, on the past Communist dictatorship converges with the anti-Communist stance held by centre-right parties. However, in the case of Albania, the ideological convergence is belied by the social distance of the politically persecuted from the post-Communist political and cultural elite. Decades of persecution and social stigma under the dictatorship had left the *déclassé* community uneducated, and henceforth not part of the reproduction of the past social formation. Weakened in cultural capital through exclusion from higher education and dispossessed of their pre-war property and wealth, this social category did not become part of the configuration of the post-Communist cultural, political or economic elite. The personal narratives of the politically persecuted express their post-Communist condition: 'I feel like I have suffered more during these ten years of trying to get back my apartment than during the internment period' (ISKK, 2017, p. 224). Bedri Çoku depicts the Communist dictatorship as aiming to 'reduce [us to] such a state that when we were freed, we wouldn't be capable, neither physically nor mentally, to serve, even the devil' (ISKK, 2016, p. 71). The Communist regime produced its own intelligentsia, which comprised the cultural and technocratic intelligentsia, separate from the party bureaucracy. The cultural and technocratic intelligentsia did not attain any autonomy until the very late period of state socialism. Earlier, the cultural and technocratic intelligentsia were a faction of the Communist *nomenklatura*. In the very last years of the Communist regime and during the regime transition, factions of the Communist intelligentsia, albeit with no public record of political involvement in dissent or persecution, constituted the post-Communist ruling elite due to their cultural capital, which devalued the political capital of the party bureaucracy (Eyal, 2000, p. 51). The post-Communist ruling elite did not succeed in establishing a consensual liberal narrative of the democratic regime. Instead, factions of the post-Communist ruling elite, which established the Democratic Party, instrumentalised the anti-Communist ideology.

The conversion of factions of the Communist intelligentsia into the post-Communist ruling elite and the continuity of those members of the repressive institutions of the Communist regime in the newly-founded democracy became issues of contestation for the formerly politically persecuted and traditional conservative parties. According to the *déclassé* community, embracing a different set of values after regime change is not sufficient to be absolved of any linkage to the past regime. According to Barid, a 'discontinuity of the careers' (personal communication, 24 December 2013) of those who were discursively represented by the politically persecuted as the 'inheritors' of the Communist dictatorship was expected after the regime change. Instead, to Barid, a real democratic revolution

'should have been the rupture or the "decommunisation" of the society' (personal communication, 24 December 2013). Extrication from the past legacy of the Communist regime is understood by him as a 'discontinuity of Communist legacy' (personal communication, 24 December 2013).

The memoirs published by the *déclassé* community prior to the establishment of the Institute demonstrate the intertextuality between the discourse produced by the Institute and the representation of the post-Communist period conveyed by the memoirs. One similarity between the two is their position on regime continuity and inheritors. Fatbardha Saraçi Mulleti, whose memoirs and interviews with politically persecuted women were reprinted by the Institute, highlights the post-Communist presence of 'the functionaries of the communist regime [who were] drafters of the ideology and internment lists' (2017, p. 99) and the 'professors of the party-state' (2017, p. 311). Barid reinforces the intertextuality of the discourse in his suggestion that the past is dominated by the memory of the perpetrators (personal communication, 24 December 2013). However, the representatives of the Institute distance themselves from the dominant centre-right Democratic Party, claiming that this party does not possess an authentic centre-right worldview.

4.4. The discursive construction of restorative memory

Personal narratives of oppression are intertwined with recollections of periods before the rise of the communists to power after WWII. The family recollections of the politically persecuted, who once belonged to the gentry or the educated middle-classes, became the social memory of this community following the regime change in 1990. The year 1944, contrary to the official and legal post-Communist demarcation of the beginning of the Communist regime in 1945, constitutes a milestone in their social memory. This year marks what the politically persecuted see as the takeover of power by the Communists and the end of the civil war, described as the National Liberation War by the Communists. Reshat Kripa, a pre-war middle-class survivor of the dictatorship's oppression, recounts that in the process of nation-formation, his father, being educated, worked in the state bureaucracy as an advisor to officials (ISKK, 2017, p. 115). Klorë Mirakaj describes their inherited identity as 'patriotic families and notable families [who] have led this country [Albania] so that it does not disappear on earth' (ISKK, 2017, p. 182). The period when Albania was occupied by the Fascists, who incorporated the 'Liberated Lands' (Kosovo) into Albanian territory and created a government formed of prominent local figures, is represented as a 'patriotic act aiming to unite the Albanian lands' (ISKK, 2017, p. 196). Ndrek Bazhdari, another witness, highlights the distinction between the Communists, portrayed as uncouth and ignorant, and his family, whose background was based on Roman Catholicism and urbane culture (ISKK, 2015, p. 8).

The middle class, being the most educated, succeeded in attaining symbolic capital and recognition, particularly during WWII, albeit not to the extent of the landed gentry. When narrating the social memory of the *déclassé* community, the witnesses highlight the elevated educational status as transmitted through family narratives or as a discursively constructed identity in contrast to the Communist identity. The process of political socialisation during the Communist dictatorship, even when interned or imprisoned in political prisons, is represented as a time of acculturation with the traditions stemming from the pre-Communist intellectual and political elite. Ndrek Bazhdari emphasises that

when politically imprisoned, his cultural and political identity was shared by other prisoners who were 'educated in universities in Europe, in which debates on philosophy, history took place' (ISKK, 2015, p. 31). The officials of the interwar monarchical regime are represented by Ndrek Bazhdari as honourable and trustworthy (ISKK, 2015, p. 20). The historically concrete status of the middle-classes and their symbolic capital at that time is represented in the post-Communist condition as a cherished past in need of reconstruction via social memory.

Traces of discursive intertextuality are found in the oral history narratives, which are interlinked with memoirs published prior to the Institute's establishment, and later reprinted, and with the editorials in the newspaper *Liria*. Traditional values and nationalist positions are described by Fatbardha Saraçi Mulleti as the cornerstone of Albanian national ideology and nationalist (conservative) families (2017, p. 179). The Institute has published memoirs of survivors from the interwar educated middle class. One of those memoirs describes the middle class as 'intellectuals [who identify with] [W]estern culture as members of that new elite [who] strived to contribute to the creation of the modern Albanian state' (Xhomaqi, 2017, p. 29). The daily newspaper *Liria*, which has consistently challenged the official history, represents the pre-Communist period as a treasured historical past when the country was ruled by 'honest patriots, and nationalists who later were considered enemies, imprisoned and executed whereas the real criminals (communists) were considered heroes' (1993, p. 1). The pre-Communist period is the focus of remembrance and is conveyed through the family recollections and social memory of this persecuted community by discursively representing the Communist dictatorship as unnatural to Albanian traditions. Other important landmarks of the social memory of the politically persecuted include the internment camp of Tepelenë, in which families of the nobility and middle classes, accused of being collaborators by the Communist dictatorship, were imprisoned, and the prison of Spaç (ISKK, 2015) and Qafë-Bar, where inmate revolts against the regime took place. The Institute reconstructed the Tepelenë camp in a short documentary by incorporating the narratives of the survivors, drawings by Pervizi on camp conditions, and artefacts of the interned, producing a visual museum (ISKK, 2019). The Institute has preferred this medium rather than exhibitions, of which they have not organised any. Another short documentary was made by the Institute on the revolts in Spaç prison camp (ISKK, 2015). The social practice of narrating the testimonies of oppression has become interlinked with the restoration of memories of the pre-Communist past and with the rewriting of history.

The personal narratives of the politically persecuted individuals who used to be supporters of the Communist ideology, members of the party bureaucracy or representatives of the cultural and technocratic faction of the nomenklatura express a different understanding of the Communist dictatorship and its repression. These narratives are less dominant in the Institute's discourse. One of the representatives of this category, Etrit, a man of around 60 years old with a humanist education, highlights the fact that each and every citizen under the dictatorship, even the political prisoners, had been omplicit in the regime's continuity. 'Surviving means to collaborate. Even the political prisoners pushed the wagons for the system otherwise they would be dead' (personal communication, 14 September 2014). Liri Lubonja, a Communist anti-Fascist during WWII and a member of the party bureaucracy, persecuted in the 1970s shared the same ideas expressed in another anti-Fascists' memoir (Hoxha, 2013) and questioned what she considers to be the anti-Communist Bolshevism of the anti-Communist *political families* after the regime change (Lubonja, 2015, p. 136).

The collection of memories has become a resource base rather than 'the state produced historical record' (Chari & Verdery, 2009, p. 24): an institutional legacy of the past regime, for the process of the reconstruction of the past by the Institute. The interpretative discourse of the leading representatives of the Institute on the Communist dictatorship and historical past, which is shared with the *déclassé* community, heightens the symbolic capital of the Institute's directors as *organic intellectuals* of the *déclassé* community. The representatives of the Institute have attained a higher educational status compared to other members of this community. Before the establishment of the Institute, they were already involved in disseminating the memoirs and recollections of the politically persecuted individuals coming of *political families*. Hence, when at the helm of the Institute, the leading representatives have legitimised this particular social memory through discursive production. The institutionally-recognised aim to reconstruct the past, which is made effective by a process of discursive production based on legitimising the pre-Communist social formation through the re-interpretation of history by the *déclassé* community, is what sets apart the function of this Institute from those in other ECE countries.

The internment camps, such as Tepelenë, have barely left a physical trace in the post-communist period. The Institute's representative who introduces readers to reprinted sketches by Pervizi of life in the internment camp highlights that 'it seems as if the personal narratives of those that tell of these cruelties have happened in a non-memory' (Pervizi, 2014, p. 7). Any trace of the past conveyed through this social memory is discursively constructed as 'a live memorial archive' (Pervizi, 2014, p. 5), honouring the pre-communist elite who resisted the dictatorship by remembering their experiences (Pervizi, 2014, p. 6). Non-memory is understood as non-recognition of personal narratives of oppression and cruelty, recounted by those politically persecuted, by the post-Communist social formation (Pervizi, 2014, p. 7). It is at this juncture of discursive production that the reconstruction of the past is tied to challenging, which is described by Barid 'as the official state history inherited from the past regime' (personal communication, 24 December 2013).

The personal experiences and recollections transmitted through oral history interviews carried out by the Institute are filtered by the interpretative frames of the Institute's representatives, who maintain a coherent representation of the identity of the *déclassé* community and their past. Although a variability in the discourse can be observed in the interviews, the ideological motives of discourse production tend to lead to downplaying of the personal experiences of the politically persecuted when they inadvertently praise socialism or soften the hardships experienced in internments under the dictatorship. As a result, the moral rectitude of the politically persecuted is not tarnished. When Bedri Çoku depicts the Communist regime as fraught with contradictions and dynamic changes in the nature of the regime, the *organic intellectual* as a guardian of memory downplays this representation by labelling it as a tactic of the regime to create illusions of change (ISKK, 2016, p. 21).

The expression and use of affectivity in the interactions between interviewers and members of the *déclassé* community is another facet of the subject position of the Institute's representatives in this case. The granting of access and credibility to particular witness narratives by the representatives of the Institute is mediated through the social practice of affect and the role of emotions such as feelings of sorrow towards them. The fieldwork at the Institute and semi-structured interviews highlight the importance of 'having sensitivity', a recurring phrase mentioned by Lira, a 50-year-old female

with a social science education and a leading representative of the Institute, as a necessary condition for legitimising the personal narratives. Lira argues that only those who use affective practices in oral history interviewing by not being 'aloof and objective' (personal communication, 5 August 2014) can become credible intermediaries of these lived experience and narratives. Lira explains that this practice involves 'feeling the pain of the community' (personal communication, 5 August 2014). The witnesses themselves emphasise that almost no individuals would believe their narratives of lived experience under the dictatorship. Bedri Çoku constructs the disbelief towards their sufferings with a question phrased in direct speech: 'How is it possible [for so much suffering to occur]?' (ISKK, 2016, p. 74). Ndrek Bazhdari, mentioned previously, discursively constructs the same disbelief or distance from the society: 'Our stories of suffering are beyond belief' (ISKK, 2015, p. 36).

5. Conclusion

This article has attempted to explain the peculiarities of the historical reconstruction of the past, namely the historical memory, by the Albanian Institute, which differs in terms of its effects compared to the model of a complex bureaucratic institution implemented in other post-Communist ECE countries. Through the Institute, the reconstructed past conveys the social memory of the formerly politically persecuted, which valorised the cultural past of the pre-Communist period and was reinforced paradoxically during the Communist dictatorship.

Producing texts, testimonies and recollections on the lived experience under the Communist dictatorship after the regime change does not simply involve correcting the facts after a period of misrecognition or oblivion. Witnessing and narrating the past as a social practice takes a different value and role in particular configurations of the post-Communist social formation, as attested by the Albanian case study. The institutional setting of the Institute, as a state-mandated institution endowed by law and, in theory, vested with symbolic power and resources as well as other organisational units, could have determined a more hegemonic or prevailing discourse on the past. The findings of the article belie this theoretical expectation. When examining the institutional practices anchored in social practices of the *déclassé* community and the weaker symbolic capital of the representatives of the Albanian Institute, discourse analysis provides an appropriate method to understand meaning-making processes focused on the past regime, and the interplay between the existing social formation, and the methods of reconstructing the past (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

In contrast to other ECE countries, the Albanian Institute is run by a small group of 'intimately related' people who all share a similar social origin and appropriate the same cultural past. The Albanian case presents the interesting phenomenon of how a partially forgotten or oppressed past can become – by peculiar circumstances – the official representation of the past, and demonstrates the political effects that this new social memory may have. In fact, what appears to be a wilfully biased picture of the past, created by the selective display of certain narratives, is socially and politically determined by the Communist dictatorship and the post-Communist political order. Instead of a dialogical past in a plural society, what emerges out of oblivion is a social memory.

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