

**Forgotten Structures of Oppression: The Architecture and Legacy of
Internment Camps in Communist Albania (1944-1991)**



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Introduction

Albania was a communist state from 1945 to 1991. After the fall of communism, many Albanians were persecuted. Some of the groups of people persecuted were Christians, Muslims, and people accused of conspiring against the state. The ways in which they were punished included political executions, enforced disappearances, religious persecution, deportation and imprisonment, dismissal of state employees, and forced labor. 'Families who opposed Albania's communist regime were interned' in camps (Sinoruka, 2023).

This dissertation is an attempt to engage with the architectural legacy these internment camps has left on our minds in serving as tools of oppression. A deeper look at such structures highlights the effects of space as an agent of political power and control. The internment camps in communist Albania served to break the human spirit and erase the cultural identities so that the regime was able to declare its dominance through such acts. The state used a combination of physical and psychological tactics to achieve total control through its oppressive architecture. The camps were located in a way to provide maximum isolation from the world and minimum chances of the prisoner having any contact with it. In addition to being selected geographically, the remote settings were then developed architecturally in order to aid in surveillance and confinement. High walls and small windows provided little access to the outside world, creating a form of policing that keeps prisoners helpless and vulnerable all the time.

In addition, the internal structure of these camps reflected the communist regime's structures and beliefs. The placement of guard towers, the arrangement of barracks, and the division of common spaces all alluded to the ideology of control and elimination of any individuality. The purpose of every design choice was to dehumanize the prisoners to make them objects of a massive oppressive system. Also, the oppressive structure of these camps contributed to their imprint in Albanians' collective memory. Even as the actual structures eventually began to fall apart, these memories continued to come to life and became preserved in the collective memory of the country. To many, these are not just remnants of another era but powerful symbols of the cruelty the Albanian state used against its own citizens. The permanence of these memories questions this narrative of progress and raises significant concerns regarding architecture's place in ongoing efforts to heal and reconcile the past. In light of these considerations, this dissertation critically discusses the theoretical frameworks for the analysis of the relationship between architecture and power. By analysing collective memory in the context of architecture, it delivers a multidimensional understanding in which buildings can be used as state instruments of power and control. The following thesis is based on a theoretical approach that can be applied not only to the Albanian context but also to other regimes and periods of time in history where architecture has been used as an agent of political oppression.

By conducting interviews with former internees this dissertation also seeks to contribute to the broader discourse related to the intersections between architecture and human rights. The study underscores that the legacy of communist architecture in Albania is in serious need of critical reassessment by showing how these physical spaces themselves have shaped experiences of internment and oppression. It also underlines the importance of the preservation of these sites as monuments of historical heritage, not only as a form of respect for the victims but also as a continuing warning about the risks of unrestricted political power. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I will explore architecture as a medium of violence in depth through the case studies of Tepelenë camp and Spac prison, which represent architecture playing a dual role as a facilitator of control and canvas on which the stories of resistance and resilience were told. The narratives this research explores form a

timeline not only of one of the darkest moments of Albanian history but also of the continuously present human capacity of resistance and memory.

Chapter 1: Architecture and Violence, and Collective Memory

Architecture has been used as a form of oppression to enforce power and control. Nowhere is this more evident than in internment camps. This chapter explores how the built environment can shape collective memory and act as a tool of oppression, specifically in internment camps in Albania. Why does architecture matter in understanding historical trauma? Space like internment camps and prisons have been used throughout history to enforce control and discipline. They have been used to dehumanize individuals but in doing so have become a physical record of suffering and resilience. Architecture, when designed for control, becomes an agent of violence. This chapter offers a theoretical framework for understanding the spatial and social dynamics of Albania's internment camps.

Architecture as a Medium of Violence

Internment camps are designed to confine and control occupants. This is evident in the Tepelenë camp. 'The site where the camp was positioned was a place surrounded by barbed wire and protected by armed guards on the main areas.' (Meta and Frashëri, 2018, pg. 18). Such elements highlighted the fact the internees were not free and transformed individuals into controllable entities reinforcing power hierarchies. The architectural form dictates not only how the internees live but also how they work. 'All the internees, whether they were men, women, elderly or infant, lived in sites surrounded by barbed wire and were forced to do extremely heavy work' (Meta and Frashëri, 2018, pg. 5). As one survivor recounts, 'We were 3 thousand people, became 6 thousand and... there is shortage of bread, shortage of food, just burying people every day, each day. I would never forget..' (Meta and Frashëri, 2018, pg. 25). This memory highlights these sites' significance in being places of suffering as well as leaving a lasting psychological impact on survivors and future generations. Architectural elements such as barbed wire and confined spaces also have this impact on internees. Many years after these events occurred, the memory of these elements is a common theme amongst individuals as seen in quotes previously mentioned. These so called 'barbed wire camps' were eventually outlawed.



Fig 1 - Barbed wire surrounding Tepelena Camp

Architecture and Collective Memory

Physical space and collective memory are intertwined. Events that take place in specific locations impact how people remember them. If the camp's physical structures are preserved they serve as a reminder of the atrocities that occurred there. This is important as history should not be forgotten for it would run the risk of repeating itself and highlighting what happened there and the people it happened to. The camp would therefore become a monument of the atrocities and a physical representation of the collective memory of those affected. 'Any event, attitude, or experience... occurs in a private or public place. Hence, this place will become a vital part of the memory' (Hoteit, 2015, pg. 3416). Space and memory are closely related. The camp's physicality is fundamentally connected to the cultural and emotional narratives that form in its aftermath. Under the theory of collective memory, communities and groups remember and reconstruct the past to align with their present identity and principles (Moliner and Bovina, 2019, pg. 2). Halbwachs argues that 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories' (Halbwachs, 1992, pg. 38). He states that memory is not an isolated individual experience, it's rooted in shared places, rituals, and narratives. To elaborate on my earlier statements, physical spaces act as archives of collective memory. Some examples are Buildings, monuments, and landmarks. As Hoteit notes, a place's memory 'is the result of interaction between its physical components and the human or social events that occur in it,' making the architecture a crucial social setting for preserving shared memory (Hoteit, 2015, pg. 3416). Collective memory is selective, remembering some events while discarding others to maintain group cohesion and strengthen identity. As a result, collective memory is a dynamic process that is always being altered by the changing circumstances and the connections between individuals and locations.

The destruction or alteration of certain spaces by conflict, reconstruction, or neglect can lead the collective memory to fall apart, erasing vital elements of a community's identity and unity. To compare the preservation of these camps to those of other countries, one of the most known examples is Auschwitz. It is important to highlight these atrocities, otherwise the memory of the many people who lost there live becomes obscured and even forgotten. Auschwitz is a good example of how the preservation of these sites allows for a lasting impact on the nations memory. In Albania, many internment camps have been left in ruin, masking their historical significance. The act of forgetting can be just as intentional as the original intent to oppress. 'The destruction of the cultural heritage of these communities will strike their values, traditions, and finally, their identity' (Hoteit, 2015, pg. 3417). Thus, the erasure of architecture ends up being a second form of violence and a symbolic attempt to rewrite or erase history.

Early Concentration Camps

Early examples of architecture being used for mass detention and civilian control can be found in both the Spanish 'reconcentration' camps and British camps during the Boer War. These systems were transformed into major aids in oppression by the introduction of technologies such as barbed wire and automatic weapons. 'The Spanish established reconcentration camps in the 1890s to 'separate rebels from civilians,' leading to civilian deaths from disease and starvation (Pitzer, 2017). While, 'In 1900, during the Boer War, the British began relocating more than 200,000 civilians, mostly women and children, behind barbed wire into bell tents or improvised huts' (Pitzer, 2017).

More people died in the concentration camps during the Boer War than in combat. Forced labor was not a new concept. It had 'existed for centuries'.

Albanian internment camps shared many characteristics, including the examples as mentioned earlier, as well as others throughout history. There has been a lack of documentation on these camps, with most of the information being told through stories and the memory of the individuals affected. Tepelena for example, was one of the earlier camps, in operation from 1949 - 1953. Barbed wire surrounded the site as well as the internees were controlled by armed soldiers (Meta and Frashëri, 2018, pg. 23). Klara Merlika recalls her childhood in Tepelenë. She talks about how on the first day 24 children died, and about the little food they were given as rations, she even calls the internees 'slave labour' stating that they had to do a Roll call twice a day (Sinoruka, 2023). As for the camp structure itself, it was originally Italian army barracks during WWII and the bathrooms were far away. Merlika also states that every Sunday they had to remove all their belongings from the barracks and leave them outside, no matter the weather, in order to clean (Sinoruka, 2023). The harsh conditions of the camp left lasting scars on the survivors with one internee even stating that they 'would never forget' (Meta and Frashëri, 2018, pg. 25).

The site of the Teplena camp is now being turned into a museum to commemorate the victims of repression. 'Denial of human rights, history of State security, communist repression, the prison system, internment and labor camps have only recently begun to find a place in historical studies. Lack of detailed historical studies hinders the drafting of a national strategy on preserving the memory of this painful and unenlightened part of history of Albania' (Meta and Frashëri, 2018, pg. 7). While it is unfortunate that a lot of Albania's political past is unrecorded it is important to uncover as much as possible through the lived experience and memories of its victims while still understanding that, 'Memory is not an exact science; it is never accurate and is often cumbersome if so' as stated by Rossi. (Jo, 2003, pg. 234)

CHAPTER 2: Context of Communism in Albania

Enver Hoxha's communist leadership over Albania is regarded as one of the most oppressive and isolating periods in European history. This chapter explores the beliefs that inspired Hoxha's government, how it controlled the people it governed, and the important function that architecture played in maintaining the regime's rule. It also provides context for understanding how these factors led to the opening of internment camps, leaving a dark legacy that continues to influence Albanian society's collective memory.

Albania before communism

Before Albania was a communist state, it was part of the Ottoman Empire and a monarchy. 'The House of Zog ruled Albania for just over a decade' (Macnaughton, 2024). Albania was part of the Ottoman Empire until 1912 when it gained its independence. They were part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries prior to this (Macnaughton, 2024). Ahmed Muhtar Zogolli was elected president in 1925 before the country became a kingdom in 1928 and he became king of Albania. In 1939 Albania was invaded and conquered by Italy. After World War II Albania became a communist state.

Rise of Communism in Albania

Albania was among Europe's poorest and most vulnerable countries following World War II. Taking advantage of this fragile period, Enver Hoxha turned the nation into a strictly governed communist state. 'Enver Hoxha... forced its transformation from a semifeudal relic of the Ottoman Empire into an industrialized economy with the most tightly controlled society in Europe' (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024). In 1946, Hoxha declared the People's Republic of Albania, cementing his grip on power and launching nearly five decades of authoritarian rule. Hoxha's vision for Albania was rooted in a strict interpretation of Marxist-Leninist ideology, heavily influenced by Stalin's model. 'Hoxha declared himself in support of Stalin and Stalinism. When the Soviet leaders started to revise the cult of Stalin, the Albanians became extremely defensive and decided to fight for Stalin' (Ypi, 2022). Hoxha's Albania grew increasingly isolated over time, severing relations with China and the Soviet Union to maintain ideological purity.



Fig 2 - Photo of Enver Hoxha, Dictator of Albania

Hoxha established a culture of fear by labeling different groups as ‘enemies of the state’ to hold onto power. These included intellectuals, landowners, religious leaders, and anybody he thought might be a danger to his rule. ‘The narrative of a country led by Hoxha... could be sustained only at the cost of huge isolation, internal violent repression, and the intolerance of any form of dissent’ (Ypi, 2022). Many of these so-called enemies were imprisoned or sent to internment camps, where they endured unimaginable hardships.

Mechanisms of Control and Suppression

A vital part of Hoxha's repressive regime was Albania's secret police, the Sigurimi. They were notoriously efficient and kept a close eye on the general population. ‘The Sigurimi... celebrated March 20, 1943, as its founding day. Hoxha typically credited the Sigurimi as having been instrumental in his faction's gaining power’ (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994). With spies embedded in every corner of society, trust among neighbors and family members was eroded. One of the most important tools used by Hoxha's government to maintain control and advance communist ideology was education. Schools were converted into effective propaganda machines to reduce illiteracy and foster unwavering state loyalty. A significant change was brought about by the Education Reform Law of 1946, which required that all teaching methods and materials adhere to Marxist-Leninist ideals. By eliminating ‘bourgeois survivals’ from Albanian culture, this reform sought to bring the country's youth into line with the Party of Labor of Albania's view of communism. As one source explains, ‘The regime's objectives for the new school system were to wipe out illiteracy in the country as soon as possible, to struggle against ‘bourgeois survivals’ in the country's culture, to transmit to Albanian youth the ideas and principles of communism as interpreted by the party, and finally to educate the children of all social classes on the basis of these principles’ (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1994). The media, literature, and arts were also strictly regulated, only publications that promoted the regime and its ideas were permitted to be created or distributed.

Social and Cultural Impact

Hoxha's paranoia led Albania to isolate itself from both the West and its former communist allies. This isolation stunted the country's development and left its people disconnected from the outside world. ‘On the international stage, he looked to Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and China for support but fell out with each in turn. At his death Albania was almost entirely isolated’ (Macmillan, 2019, pg. 166). During Hoxha's rule women became emancipated (Guzvica, 2022). Under Hoxha's regime, women in Albania experienced significant shifts in their roles, gaining access to education, employment, and political participation in ways previously unavailable. These changes challenged patriarchal norms and marked a major step toward gender equality. However, these advancements were not without challenges. Women were often tasked with labor-intensive jobs while still expected to manage traditional domestic roles. According to one source, ‘some traditional gender roles remained, including a rather unusual decision to award state medals for women who would give birth to, raise, and educate ten or more children. Much like Stalin's Soviet Union, Hoxha's Albania was torn between radical modernization and conservative reaction’ (Guzvica, 2022). In theory, the dictatorship encouraged emancipation but in practice, women frequently had to balance the demands of work and home life.

Architecture as an Instrument of Power

Albanian architecture under Enver Hoxha's rule served as a purposeful instrument of propaganda and control, much more than just a setting for the communist system. Monumental

architecture and urban planning were intended to project the state's power, cementing the regime's authority while silencing criticism.

Architecture served as a physical manifestation of Hoxha's power. 'The monumental scale of many of these buildings, for example, reflects the communist emphasis on collective power over individual autonomy' (SARP Building the Future, 2023). One of the most prominent examples is the Pyramid of Tirana, initially built as a museum dedicated to Hoxha. This massive structure served as a continual reminder of the regime's power and represented its power. As noted, 'These symbolic structures perpetuated the state's ideology, shaping the way Albanians understood their history and their place in the world' (SARP Building the Future, 2023).

The regime's strategy included urban planning in addition to individual buildings. The architecture was often stripped of individuality 'often constructed with raw, grey concrete, the buildings were manifestations of the communist ideology of utility and egalitarianism' (SARP Building the Future, 2023). Monuments were placed in parks, squares, and other public spaces as a constant reminder of the state's authority. This restriction of the physical world shows how architecture has evolved into a subtle but persistent enforcer of ideological control even through the use of materials.

Collapse of the Regime

Hoxha's death in 1985 marked the beginning of the regime's decline, which culminated in the fall of communism in 1991. However, the trauma of the internment camps and the decades-long oppressive rule the regime exercised were not erased by its fall. Albania is still dealing with the effects of its communist history decades later. For the pain they went through, many internment camp survivors are still waiting for acknowledgment and justice. The scarcity of conversation surrounding these incidents underlines a larger attempt to confront and remember this problematic period in Albanian history.

Architecture during Hoxha's communist regime was far more than a collection of buildings. It was a powerful instrument of ideological control. From monumental structures like the Pyramid of Tirana to urban layouts designed for surveillance, the built environment was a silent enforcer of the state's authority. The establishment of internment camps further exemplified the regime's calculated use of architecture to isolate and dehumanize free thinkers. These elements, central to the regime's oppressive policies, continue to cast a shadow over Albania, shaping its collective memory and ongoing efforts to come to terms with the past. This chapter provides the essential context for understanding the internment camps explored in the next chapter, sites where the regime's ideological and architectural strategies intersected with human suffering in their most brutal form.

CHAPTER 3: Camps in Albania – The History of These Architectures

Architecture played a crucial role in the regime's strategy of oppression. In a greater historical context, these camps have been overlooked and there has not been much conversation surrounding them globally. In this chapter, I will discuss the architectural and functional aspects of Albanian internment camps and prisons. I will primarily focus on Tepelenë camp and Spaç prison in this section. By analyzing the built form, purpose, and lived experiences of internees, this study seeks to highlight the link between architecture and oppression. Through the lens of survivor testimonies and historical documentation I will explore how these structures have left a lasting impact on the memory of Albanians today.

History of camps in Albania

The first camps in Albania were opened in 1945. The first site of interment was Kruja, in the north (Zifla, 2020). Kruja was opened from March 1945 to September 1947. The first interment site in the south of Albania was, Berat, march 1945 - may 1949. After the closure of Berat, the interned were transferred to Tepelena, 1949 - 1953 (Zifla, 2020). Participant B was interned in both Berat and Tepelena. He began his internment at the age of 2 (Appendix B, 2025). He recalls being sent to a camp and after six months being moved to Tepelena, which he likened to Auschwitz (Appendix B, 2025). He stated, 'They don't care for us. They didn't treat us like humans. They treated us like the enemy. I didn't know what enemy meant when I was two years old until seven years old, but they treated us like this' (Appendix B, 2025). The prisoners of these camps were punished, used for labor, and isolated. The Institute for the Study of the Crimes and Consequences of Communism – ISKK, and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung released a video showing the Tepelena camp rebuilt in 3D graphics. It was reconstructed through the memories of former political prisoners and the sketches of Lek Perviz (Harta e Kujteses, 2021).



Fig 3 and Fig 4 - Stills from the film showing a reconstruction of the space where the interned slept at Tepelena Camp

The political prisoners were forced to cut trees for the whole day and take the wood back to the camp by carrying it on their shoulders (Pasoma, 2019). 'In Tepelena my mom went every day in the mountain to get wood for heating. Every day they sent her to the mountain. But I had been five, six years old. I was not able to work' (Appendix B, 2025). They had to endure many hardships in their daily life. There were many casualties in the camp, one CIA document stated that, 'more than 50 persons died in the first half of 1951 (CIA, 1951, page 2).

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	SECURITY INFORMATION		
	CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY	REPORT	
	INFORMATION FROM		
	FOREIGN DOCUMENTS OR RADIO BROADCASTS	CD NO.	
COUNTRY	Albania	DATE OF INFORMATION	1951
SUBJECT	Political - Concentration camps	DATE DIST.	14 Mar 1952
HOW PUBLISHED	Daily newspaper	NO. OF PAGES	2
WHERE PUBLISHED	Belgrade		
DATE PUBLISHED	27 Oct 1951		
LANGUAGE	Serbo-Croatian	PPLEMENT TO	PORT NO.

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REVEALS DETAILS OF ALBANIAN CONCENTRATION CAMPS

In addition to 18 prisons, there are 12 known concentration camps in Albania, located in Tepelene, Beden Mallq, Berat, Vrasa Suti, Tropoje, Kruje, Viliqas, Vile? Vilash?, Shkoder, Himare, Korce, and Isul.

There are 3,600 internees in the Tepelene camp, which was established in the beginning of 1949 and is the oldest and largest in Albania, and 2,000 in the Beden camp in Kavaje. About 70 percent of the internees in Tepelene are women and children. The highest death rate is among the children. The following children died in 1949: the less than one-year-old twins of Ljilje Muc Djerde /Xherxhe?/ from Koplik, the small child of Zef Mirasa from Bajze, the year-old son of Fran Basa from Bajze, two children of Prenash Djerde /Xherxhe?/ from Ljohje, and the three children of Djuste /Xhuste?/ Gora?, who were 10 years, 6 years, and 6 months old.

The camp commandant is Lt Dzafer /Xhafar?/ Pegaci. He is an ignorant villain and tyrant who has forcibly raped young and pretty women who have refused to become intimate with him. He loves to see children die.

The internees in the Tepelene camp sleep in four rows of double-deck wooden beds. Families are not separated. The building has no garret /no insulation between the ceiling and roof?. The camp provides a wooden bed and a small piece of soap monthly. The daily food consists of tea for breakfast and warm broth and 650 grams of bread for lunch and dinner. No bedding of any kind, clothing, footwear, or other food is furnished. Nothing additional is given to even the youngest children.

It is difficult to maintain cleanliness in the camp, for internees are not given brooms but must clean with branches. The camp is infested with vermin. An excessive number of internees are ill because of poor food, filth, vermin and hard physical labor; tuberculosis is a very widespread disease. Many die because of illness; most deaths are among children and adult males. The children die because of low resistance to disease and adult males because of exhaustion from slave labor.

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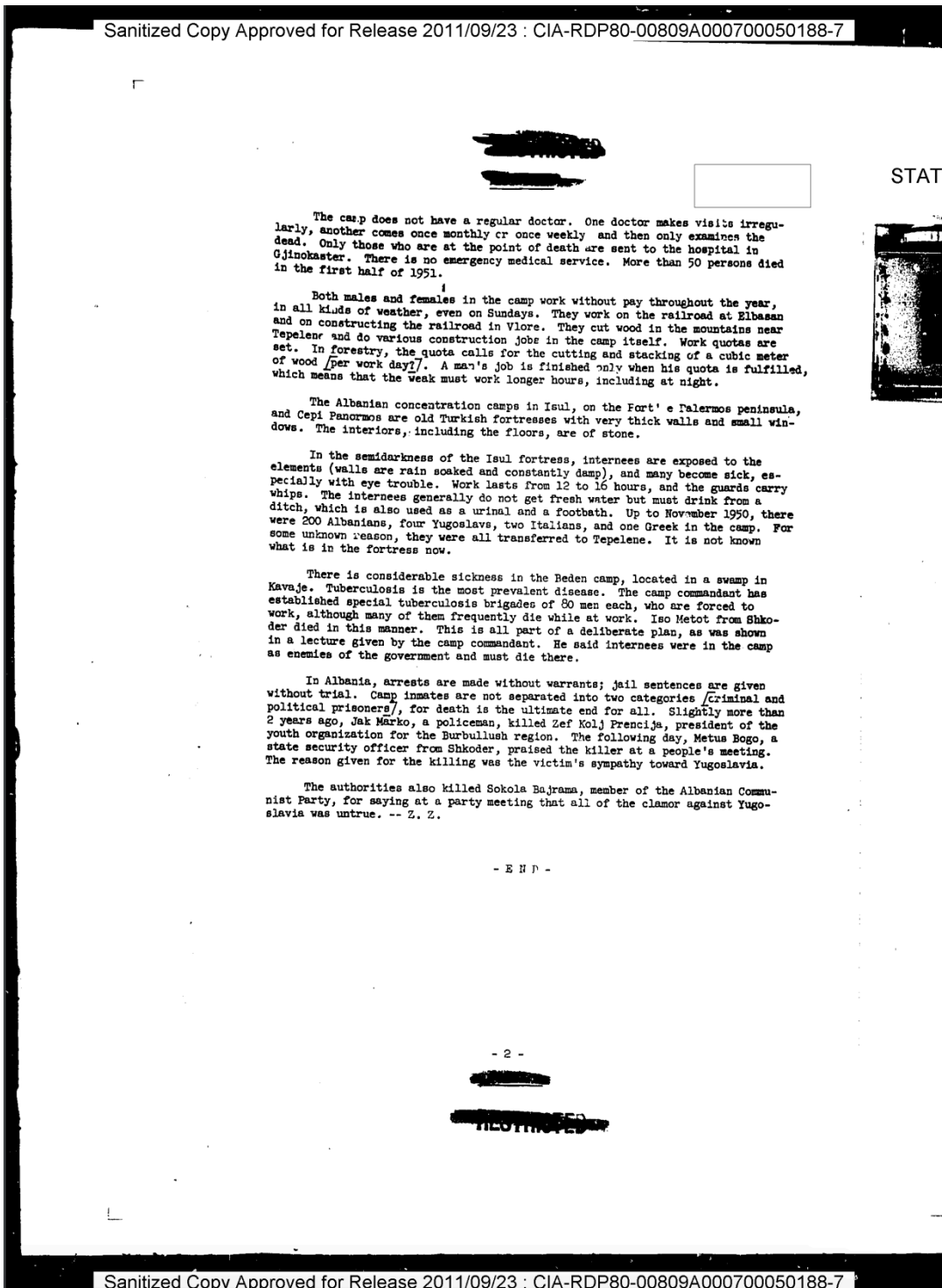


Fig 5 & 6 - CIA document on details from albanian internment camps

As seen in Figure 5 life in the Tepelena camp was unbearable. People would be neglected and die. Sickness ran rampant through the camp. 'My mom and the older ladies tried to keep us clean with the conditions we had ... there was scabies there and you would scratch' (Appendix B, 2025). They did not treat them well. They all practically lived on top of each other, in these barracks with wooden bunk beds, where over 500 people would live together (Pasoma, 2019). Every aspect of these camps aided in the oppression of these people. From the treatment to the work. They were isolated. The

camp was in the middle of the mountains, separated from any outsiders. These camps would oftentimes be in rural or isolated areas. Not only was this for the prisoners, but it was all to separate what was happening in these camps from other people living in Albania at the time.

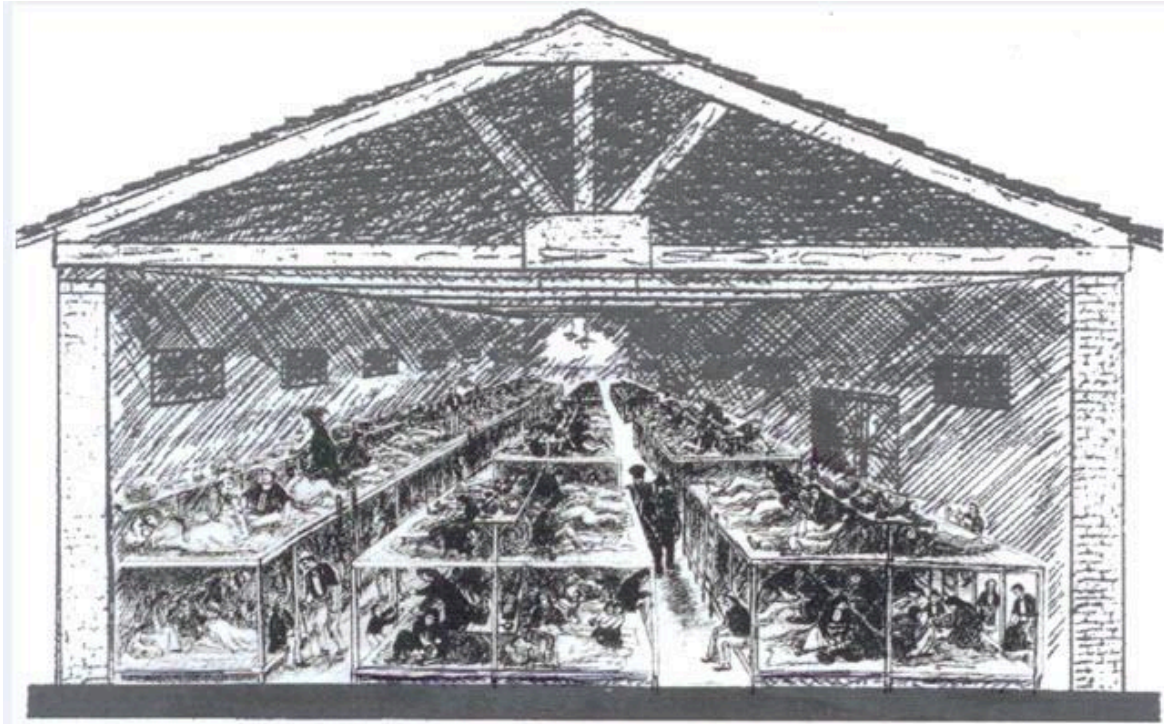


Fig 7 - Sketch of Barracks, Lek Pervizi

Another camp was Porto Palermo. Porto Palermo was located around 7 miles from the seaside town of Himarë. It is located on a peninsula and is a castle/ fortress built in 1804 by Ali Pasha of Tepelene. When trying to research this site I could only find one source that actually spoke of the imprisonment of people here. It is unfortunate that there was not more information available. Instead, while conducting my research I was met with many sites talking about how 'beautiful' the castle is and that it's a must visit tourist attraction in Albania. It is glamorized for its history before communism, but the mention of what happened there during this era is nowhere to be found. As I mentioned I was only able to find one source about this, written by the niece of one of the interned, criticizing the glamorization of the castle and lack of knowledge visitors have of the site (Gjomarkaj, 2021). It is appalling that Albania is letting what happened there be forgotten. 'The government must ensure that ALL the history of its castles are provided to tourists, not just pick and choose the eras they feel are more appealing. Fifty years of communism, fifty years of isolation, fifty years of atrocities cannot be just swept under the rug with some promotional videos and pictures of foreigners admiring the view' (Gjomarkaj, 2021). The government chose specific people to be sent here, specific families. Participant B was sent here at the age of 7 with his family. He remembers his mom putting stones under his mattress to lift the bed from the floor because it was covered in water (Appendix B, 2025). They slept in a tunnel with no windows. The only food they had to eat was dry. For example, cheese and some dry meat, nothing to cook (Appendix B, 2025). There also was no bathroom and they had to 'hide behind a stone or something' behind the castle (Appendix B, 2025). The site itself is preserved, but there seems to be a lack of recognition from Albania for these political prisoners and the oppression that took place here.



Fig 8 - Aerial view of Porto Palermo Castle

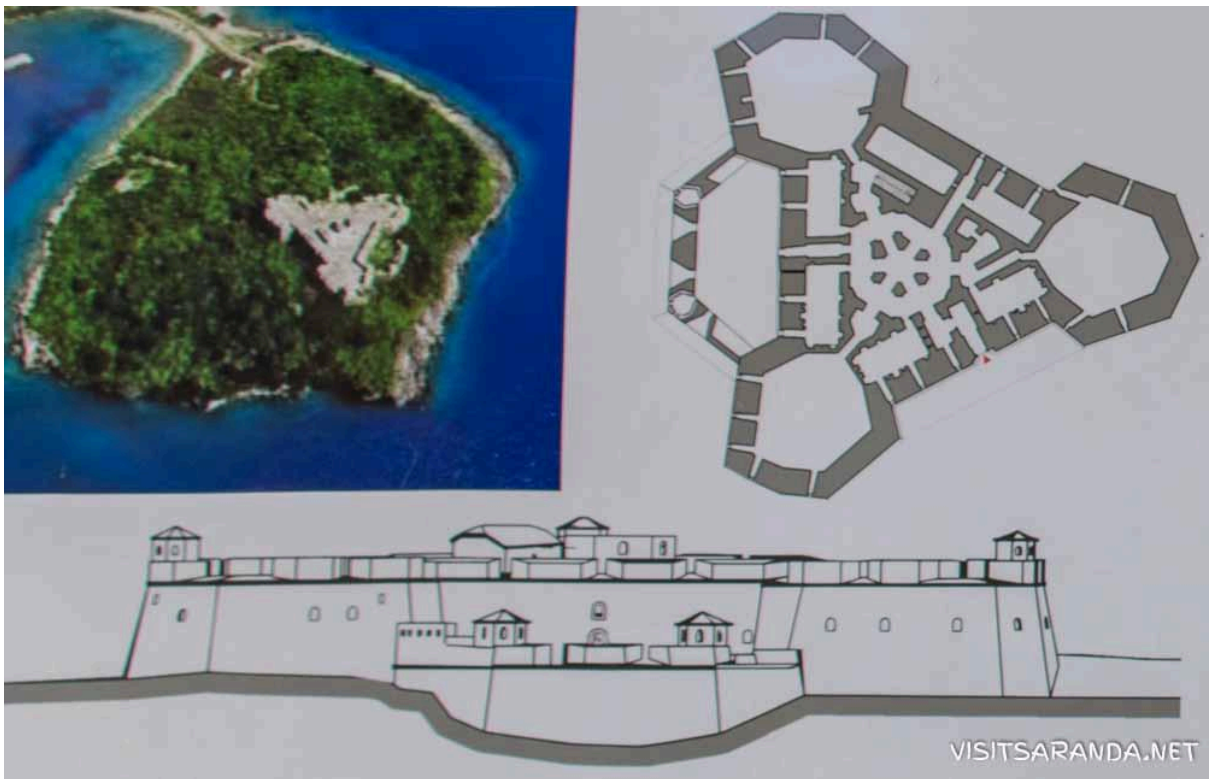


Figure 9 - Plan and elevation of Porto Palermo Castle.



Fig 10 - image of the interior of Porto Palermo Castle

History of prisons in Albania

Other than internment camps, people were also imprisoned for their ‘crimes’ during this political era. One of the most notorious was Spaç Prison. ‘Spaç Prison was a notorious labor camp established in 1968 by the Communist government of Albania at the site of a copper and pyrite mine, in a remote and mountainous area in the center of the country’ (Spaç Prison, 2025). Because of the location of the prison, ‘no perimeter wall was needed to secure the complex, only barbed wire fencing punctuated by occasional guard posts and a front gate’ (Spaç Prison, 2025). Participant B was a prisoner here in the 80s. He was arrested for Agitation and Propaganda (Appendix B, 2025). The prisoners of the camp were ‘forced to mine copper in eight-hour shifts, six and sometimes seven days a week’ (Anon, 1984, pg. 1). Participant B likened the guards to princes, using the prisoners for all the hard jobs. ‘They had our lives in their hands’ (Appendix B, 2025). There were many human rights violations in the camps and also when the prisoners were being arrested. ‘Former political prisoners have often alleged that they were beaten or otherwise ill-treated during investigation proceedings in order to force them to make ‘confessions’’ (Anon, 1984, pg. 1). There were no architectural plans of the camp, but one illustration was based on sketches by people who were imprisoned in Spaç labour camp between the mid 1970s and 1982 (fig. 10). ‘The political prisoners held at Spaç included some of the most prominent Albanian intellectuals of the twentieth century, granting it a special place in the collective memory of that era’ (Spaç Prison, 2025). Much of the elements I have mentioned seem to be a common theme amongst prisoner testimonies. Therefore, further solidifying its place in the memory of the nation. These devastating story's not only highlight the inhumane treatment of the prisoners but also the lasting impact that these structures have had on Albania's historical consciousness.

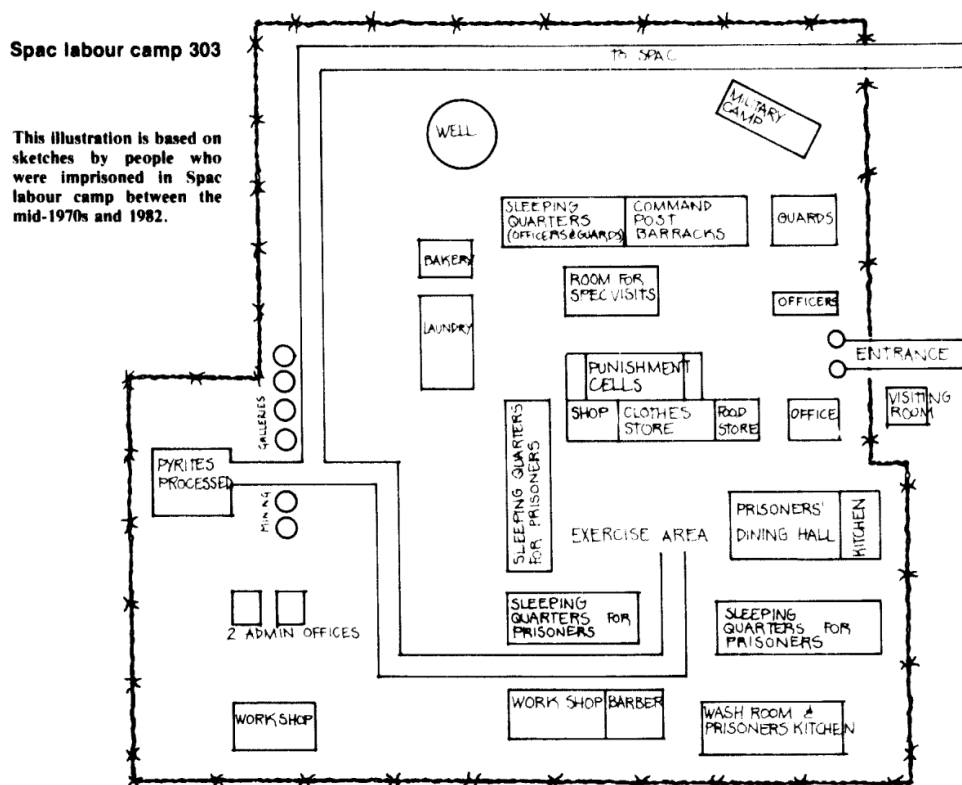


Fig 11 - Illustration of Spaç



Fig 12 - Overview of Spaç Prison, with main structures indicated



Fig 13 - The now-abandoned Spaç Prison

The People's Socialist Republic of Albania

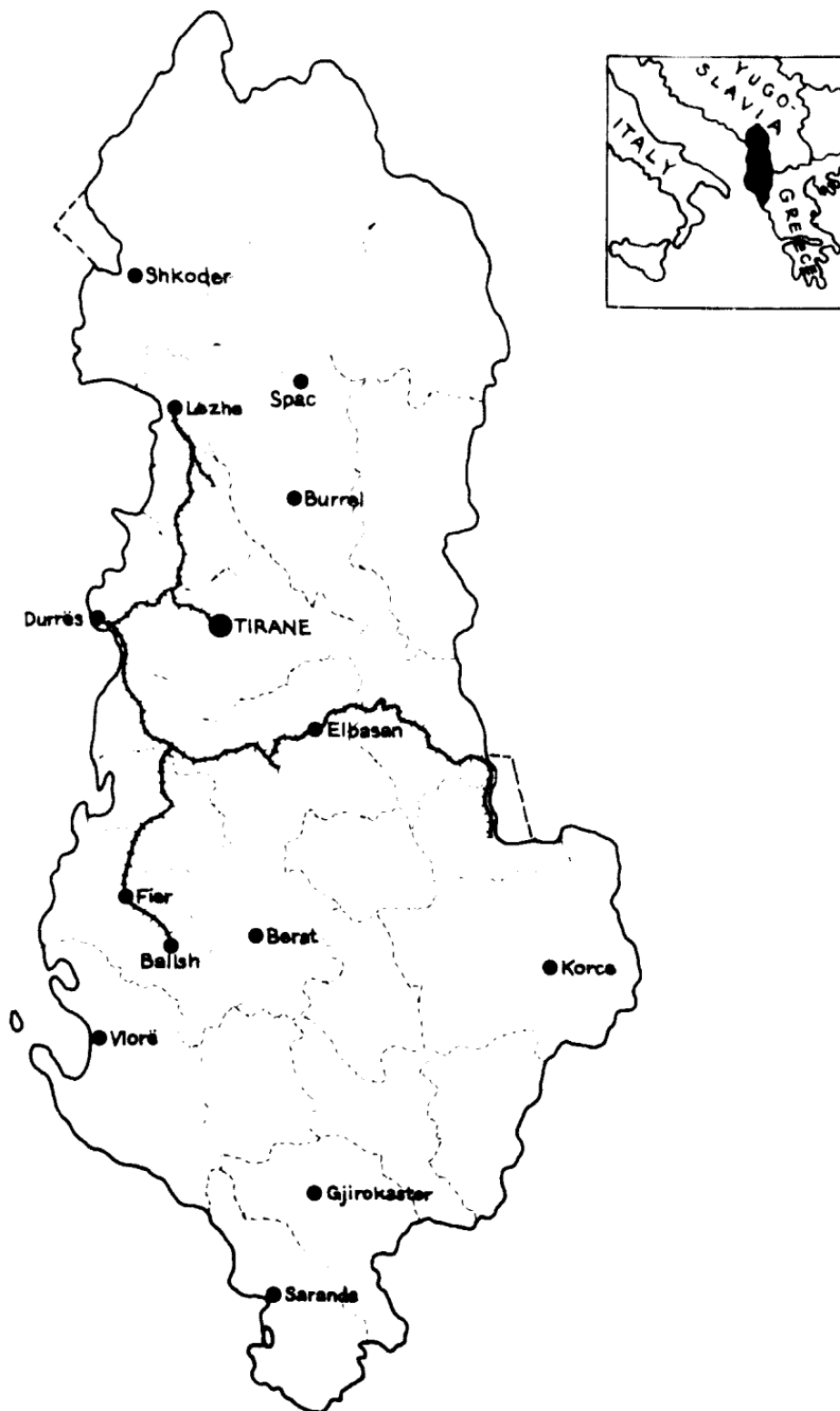


Fig 14 - Map of where prisons were in Albania

CHAPTER 4: Personal Family History – Camp Gradishtë and Prison

In this chapter I will discuss the history of the camp, exploring its built form, strategic location, and its function. I will use the interviews I conducted with my family that have lived in the camp to contextualize Gradishtë within its historical narrative. The participants of these interviews will not be mentioned by name to keep anonymity. This chapter will also underline the similarities and differences between the camp and prisons. And lastly, I aim to document the lived experience of daily life in Gradishtë through personal narratives. This analysis highlights the resilience and capacity of individuals to endure and adapt to extreme conditions.

History of Gradishtë camp

Like many other Internment camps in communist Albania, there is not much information on the conditions of the camp and its built environment. ‘After the barbed wire camps were closed, the villages around Lushnja and Fier became the primary internment sites’ (Zifla, 2020). Gradishte is located outside the city of Lushnja and was built in the 1950s (Boughriet, 2020). The people interned at the camp were that family of people accused of crimes against the communist regime (Sinoruka, 2023). They had to work in agriculture, but they were paid very little. ‘Gradishte is a ruin today, doomed to general amnesia, though there are people who still live there’ (Boughriet, 2020).



Fig 15 - Inside a home in Gradishte, Present



Fig 16 - Outside a home in Gradishte, Present

Relationship Between Camp and Prison

When the ‘barbed wire’ camps were first shut down, some of the men were moved to Gradishte with their families, including Participant B. Participant A recalled a period when ‘every 3-4 months they would arrest somebody’ (Appendix A, 2025). Participant B lived in Gradishte for 20 years before being arrested in 1980 and put in Spaç and Qafë Bar (Appendix B, 2025). ‘Six months earlier they had arrested my uncle and I was there. And when they arrested my dad, I wasn’t. It was January 15, so I didn’t know I was in school... my friend’s dad’s had been arrested... slowly, they told me, well, you’re dad too. They weren’t coming just for one person anymore. They were coming and picking up two’ (Appendix A, 2025). Women were left to raise the children on their own. The prisoners were able to communicate with family by sending letters (Appendix B, 2025). Families were also allowed to visit but they would need permission and it would take ‘two days to come in the mountain’ from Gradishte, so they were not able to visit often (Appendix B, 2025). Life was challenging for both the prisoners and the internees. This unjust separation of families was a gross violation of human rights

Lived Experience

As the relative of multiple political prisoners I have grown up hearing the stories of their life in Albania. When they would recall their youth, they would generally look back on the good memories. I always understood that their lives were paved in hardships and I always admired their ability to make the best out of an unfortunate situation. While conducting my interviews I really got to understand just how resilient they were. Their stories not only deepened my understanding of their strength but also emphasized the stark contrasts with their nostalgic recollections and the oppressive realities that they experienced, strengthening the emotional and historical depth of my study.

It becomes necessary for one to take into consideration how the physical environment influenced everyday living while analyzing the lived experiences of people interned in Gradishte. The participants lived in barracks they shared with multiple other families. Participant A, C, and D all mentioned how thin the walls were, and how you could 'hear everything.' Participant C talked about how when she first moved to the camp she had to share one room with her husband, his brother, and mother in law. But, after her kids were born they moved into the room next door as well, that originally had another family (Appendix C, 2025). Before they had the other room they had to go through a window to get in and out of there house. 'One day I entered from the window and I fell from this window and I was pregnant... I lost the baby. Because I fell from this window cause it was wet, it was winter' (Appendix C, 2025). Participant C suffered a miscarriage. This was her first pregnancy. Men and women had to do the same work. There was no difference. They would work for '8. 10. Sometimes 12' hours a day (Appendix C, 2025). Women could also get arrested and put in prison. When participant C's husband was getting arrested she questioned why, and when she said he didn't do anything she was told to stop talking or they would arrest her too (Appendix C, 2025). 'Women were left with all the burden of taking care of the family' (Appendix A, 2025). The kind of jobs at the camp were in Agriculture. They were payed but not a lot. In 30 days they only made \$50 in todays money (Appendix A, 2025). They got rations from the store and water from a well. 'There was no water, it was just one water well for the whole... it was like two or three hundred families probably there' (Appendix A, 2025). Six families would share one bathroom (Appendix A, 2025). 'It was just this hole in the ground' (Appendix D, 2025). All of these aspects aided in there oppression. They were not allowed basic amenities or freedom of speech. This harsh reality displays the difficult circumstances in which these individuals lived, where even basic privacy and safety weren't available, affecting their physical and mental health.

CHAPTER 5: Collective Renderings and Imagination of These Camps

The main focus of this chapter is to analyze the collective memory of Internment camps, specifically looking at Gradishte. By looking at the testimonies of my family, I will look at how they remember certain elements and if there recountings differed at all. These testimonies show both shared and unique memories that underline the personal impact of historical trauma. In the context of Albania as a whole, I aim to look at how these camps are remembered or forgotten and the lasting impact they have left on the nation. Through establishing the lasting impact of prisons and internment camps on both individual memories and national consciousness, this chapter ultimately aims to connect the personal experiences of my family with the broader narrative of Albania.

Family Narratives

Looking into how each participant remembers the physical spaces, there recountings all seem to stay the same with a few minor differences and some going into more details than others. For example, they all remember their home the same but there are some differences with how many families they remember sharing the barracks with. Participant A said there were 12 families in one compound with 6 families on one side and 6 on the other (Appendix A, 2025). While Participant B said 'any barracks had maybe 7-8 families on one side and on another side six or seven. So around 15 families' (Appendix A, 2025). Participant C didn't mention how many families stay in one barrack, but stated that there were 4 barracks and 4, so 8 total (Appendix C, 2025). Participant D remembers there being four or five families on one side and another 4 or 5 on the other side. He also said that there were 3 or 4 barracks lined up (Appendix D, 2025). Participants B & C mentioned how B and A built a kitchen together outside but D remembers it being built by B and his brother. Participant D mentioned more of the actual built elements in his statements. 'I remember everything about it. It was made of ... mud and hay... It was like ... Long barracks and they would go... north to South' (Appendix D, 2025). He also mentioned how they made bricks to build the kitchen, 'So they'll take the mud, and they'll put the hay inside it, and they would leave it out to dry in the sun. And then it would dry out and become hard like a brick' (Appendix D, 2025).

I also found it interesting that some of them would mention the same details they remembered about the house. For example, A & D both remember there being mice running around in the ceiling (Appendix A, 2025)(Appendix D, 2025). For the most part they all remembered the same element. B and C shared a lot more sad memories, while A and D shared more happy memories. I think you could really understand the role of all the members of the family, just from what they shared. Participant B shared many memories on the hardships he had to endure. He was the only participant that experienced the 'barbed wire' camps and prison so this perspective is very understandable. 'Prisons I was in Spac and Qafë Bar. And concentration camps: I was in Gradishte. I was in Tepelena. I was in Porto Palermo. I was in Berat. I was in Kuçovë. I was in Shijak. I was in Valias. I don't know, maybe another place, but who could remember all this?' (Appendix B, 2025). The responses from B emphasize the effect these experiences had on people who lived through them by presenting a vivid picture of life in the camps, which was characterized by suffering, terror, and the constant risk of death. Participant C also recounted more upsetting memories. She was only interned at the age of 18 when she went in for love. But, as a mother, she had to make many sacrifices and adjustments. Her story is one of loyalty and fortitude in the face of harsh and dehumanizing conditions, showing the psychological effects of past trauma as well as the fortitude needed to uphold one's dignity and familial bonds under such circumstances. Participant A's memories were mostly happy. She reflected on how she didn't know any different when she was younger so her memories of the camp were filled with joy, but when she grew up she was forced to leave school and work. She pointed out how her perspective changed as she got older. Seeing her life as normal as a kid but realizing its

oppressiveness as she grew older. Participant D left albania at the age of 15 so his perspective was of the later end of communism in albania and he still had a childlike innocence. Unlike his sister he was able to attend all of his schooling and because he was the youngest he was often given special treatment by his family. It seems like from the start of communism to its eventual downfall conditions slow started to change. Despite the harsh conditions, recounted a strong sense of community. People would support eachother.



Fig 17 & 18 - Photos of Gradishte taken by participant B

Nationwide Collective Memory

There seems to be a general knowledge of the atrocities of these camps, but a lot is still forgotten by the nation. To better explain this, when I was trying to research Gradishtë, there was practically no information. This goes for most of the camps during this period, like Porto Palermo, as I mentioned earlier. The lack of memorialization of these sites leaves a gap in collective memory. These sites are being left in ruins and if they are not protected they will be eventually forgotten. The reason the lack of information about what happened in Porto Palermo is outrageous is because the site is being preserved, but the memory is being erased because of the lack of resources. While some sites are being memorialized, for example Tepelene and Spac, I don't believe there has been enough of an effort by the Albanian government. Participant B did not breathe free air until he was 49, imprisonment was all he knew of Albania (Appendix B, 2025). Participant C still feels scared when she sees police today (Appendix C, 2025). Participant A was a mother by the time she saw her father again after his imprisonment (Appendix A, 2025). There has been so much life lost that they can never get back, so much trauma that still has lasting impacts even today, the least the government can do is make sure these tragedies are never forgotten.

Conclusion

The oppression architecture analyzed in this dissertation stands as witness to the brutal regime that controlled every aspect of life in communist Albania. The deliberate suppression of any kind of disagreement was made possible by internment camps. They also left a permanent scar on the Albanian conscience that remains in the country's collective memory.

Dissecting internment camps brings one to realize that such structures were only filled with features that were deliberately designed to crush the human spirit. The use of guard towers, small living quarters, and restricted common areas are more than security features; they were instruments of dehumanization. These camps and prisons were designed to keep privacy at a minimum and surveillance at a maximum, the regime wanted to turn individuals into the cogs of an ideological machine, becoming an example to the rest of the nation on what would happen if they were to revolt. While the physical structures may have decayed over time, their architectural legacy stays fresh in the minds of those who survived the horrors they once housed.

This dissertation has also explored the individual stories of former political prisoners linked to these structures of oppression. The reconstructed narrative of life from within the camps, through interviews with former internees, presents real life accounts of survival in the face of continuous suppression. These personal stories underpin not only the resilience of the human spirit but, importantly, they act as a counter narrative against the regime's erasure of an individual's identity. It is these collective memories of experiences of internment that contest the regime and point toward remembering as is evident from oral histories and personal memories.

Furthermore, the role of collective memory in shaping and reshaping the legacy of these architectural forms has been a point of analysis. The permanence of memories of the camps in the public consciousness, when efforts have been made to eradicate them from historical memory, attests to deep wounds inflicted by the regime, which are still not fully healed. The preservation of these sites as memorials is a way not only to pay homage to the suffering of the victims but also to remind future generations of the risks of unchecked power. Architecture, in such a context, goes beyond its physical connotation to a dynamic symbol of trauma and healing that reflects an ongoing struggle for reconciliation with a painful past.

As Albania continues to wrestle with its Communist legacy, remnants of internment camps are at the same time relics of oppression and an important opportunity for educational and commemorative efforts. The preservation efforts and the challenges such work entails have brought about a very important dialogue between remembering and forgetting. This dissertation will argue that meaningful reconciliation with the past can be achieved only by a conscious, thoughtful act of preservation of this memory, both architectural and personal. All this has to be done by combining respect for the stories of survivors with the need for incorporating such sites within the general context of national history and common identity.

While being an obvious tool of oppression, the architecture of Communist Albania's internment camps has come to be a far more complex metaphor for the nation's troubled past and its continuing path toward reconciliation. In this way, it not only advances the academic debate on the architecture-power relationship but also documents the undying vitality of one's collective memory and the unbreakable human spirit. Albania, going forward, needs to preserve more sites of camps and help in the documentation in more human testimonies.

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Fig 17 & 18 - Photos of Gradishte taken by participant B

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW STATEMENT

All the interviews for this project have been taken following the approval by the ethics committee. They were taken following the 2nd of January, whereby participants were invited for a conversation for up to one hour on Microsoft Teams. Listed below are the obligations that were to meet for each interview.

Obligations:

- The transcripts for each interview were provided by the transcript function on Microsoft Teams.
- Conversations were maxed at an hour.
- All personal data has not been included and names have been anonymised.
- Participants will be interviewed in English.

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APPENDIX A

Interview with Participant A (Age 58) on the 3rd of January 2025 for 1 hour.

Albanian woman who was born in Gradishte camp and interned in an Internment camp in Communist-era Albania

Emma Libohova

What's your earliest memory of living in the camp?

A

Oh, it's a nice memory actually.

Emma Libohova

What is it?

A

I said that before. It's my mom and her cousin came together with me from the maternity and they had to be in this. Back of a truck. You know that they used, farming truck. Whatever, in the place we lived, and soon as they... no, she came with my sister, right. And I had missed her so much because she was like 3 days away in the maternity ward and it was like 2 hours to walk to get there. So obviously I couldn't go. I was three years old, and when she came, it was cold. It was January 24. And she came with my sister. And I was so happy. I was so happy. And I remember my cousin. I remember my cousin. That was with them, and I was actually, I was happier to see my cousin, I think more than my sister because we were like nine months apart and she was like my best friend. So that's really my first memory that I have and then, it's not really a memory, but it seems like I remember it because he was told so many times. I gave my sister a little candy when they had her in the room by herself and I went to mom saying mom, I give my sister a little candy and she ran there and she found her choking and grabbed it with her finger. And, you know, and my sister always when we used to fight would say 'you hated me from the day I came because you gave me the candy.' Jokingly, of course. That's my memory, childhood memories.

Emma Libohova

So was that when she first came home from the hospital?

A

When she first came home from the hospital, I gave her candy because I loved her so much and I almost choked her.

Emma Libohova

What do you remember about your house in the camp?

A

My house. Well, I have another memory actually. When I was little with my friend, there used to be this guy there that had finished the biology university in the Soviet Union.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

A

And he came. He was young and he was there. And you would teach us how to collect, like, wildflowers. And we were little and he saw us one day. And he was teaching us about biology and how to hold the flowers for longer in the water. And how to take care of them. It was like my first memory, I guess because I loved flowers so much. So that's my first, one of my first memories also, and from my home, my home, my home was all kinds, was very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. It wasn't really a home? There were just two rooms.

Emma Libohova

And you shared your room?

A

Yeah. We shared the room, yes, absolutely. And not just that we shared our rooms. It was like a long, long canopies. Well, where? A lot of people like us lived people in the gulags.

Emma Libohova

In the barracks.

A

Yes, in the barracks. So we were next to each other with very thin walls and we would even talk to each other during the night. We would say goodnight to each other like you know, like to be fair in the walls and. Yeah. And. And I remember at night moises in the ceiling running in that empty space between the ceiling on the roof and I was so scared. Or it would rain and it would drip from the ceiling and it had had made all these marks like, they become oxidated, and they become all kinds of shapes. And at night, when I was little, I would make all this kind of weird, you know, connections like you make with the cloud, with the shapes on the ceiling like, oh, that's a house, that's a flower, that's a bee, all sort of thing, you know.

Emma Libohova

Can you describe what the camp looked like from the outside?

A

Perspectives, right? Different perspectives. Because you live it as a child and everything is cool when you're a child because you have your parents, so everything it's, no matter what, and you don't know any better anyway so, that is how the world is in your eyes. And then when you're grown up and you start watching TV and other things and you know how much you were limited, that you look at it a different way. So it's two different ways of seeing it, two different perspectives as a child. I remember. I loved it. I loved it because it was. Like the summers, we used to get all the kids in the back of the houses. There was this field and we used to play until it got really, really dark. All of us together like 30 kids. I mean, we didn't have toys. We didn't have anything, but I think we had so much more fun than children today. And then I remember learning how to bike with my dad, which was a lot of fun. I remember because they were like this huge Fields, endless fields and you would see the, I would see the sunset and it was the most beautiful thing, you know, or all night that the frogs singing and all those things. So it was like, really magical when you're little. But then when you start growing up and that's the only place you can be, they don't allow you to live anywhere else or to go anywhere else and then you just see the mud in the winter or the dust in the summer. There was no water, it was just one water well for the whole, it was like I, don't remember, it was like two or three hundred families probably there, they had made, they had drained a swamp and brought all the people from the camps, they brought there. And of course, there were those that would supervise us that were just like villagers from other places and came supervising us. And there was us, the enemies of the people. Supposedly, that, I mean, I was born such a thing, and my dad was too when he became an enemy of the people. So we lived there and it was just one well for water and there would be these long, long lines for water and and people would get there children to stay in line because people will be so busy working cooking. We would wait on line to get 10 liters of gasoline to cook with to warm the water for washing the clothing with to wash ourselves with. Everything was like, everything was ratio and everything was lines. Even getting it, was two litres of milk. You could get max a day. We didn't even have money when my father went to prison for that 2 liters of milk. So when we got milk, it was like special. You know. So everything was lines and children were assigned to wait on line because adults were very busy doing other things beside working on the field, cooking, cleaning, doing all that stuff. So our duty was to wait on line for hours with big pots and buckets and everything we've had in the house to fill it up with water for use, you know.

Emma Libohova

Are there guards around?

A

There were no guards when I grew up. When my mother, when my grandmother and my dad were little. When my dad and my uncle were little and my grandmother was young. There were guards. They were in different kind of camps. When I was born, it was a camp, but there were no guards. But there was this line that everybody knew that my parents could not cross, right? They had to have special permits, which many times they wouldn't give. Like when my uncle got engaged. And to go get his wife in another village. They didn't permit him, you know. They didn't let him go get his wife. So anyway, it was weird. So it was this line that they could not cross, but they had to go further to work but there was always a line. But people like my father, my uncle, and his friends they had to do what it was it called. It was like a name calling.

Emma Libohova

Roll call.

Forgotten Structures of Oppression: The Architecture and Legacy of Internment Camps in Communist Albania (1944-1991)

A

Yeah. At 7:00, in the morning and 7:00 at night. And then sometimes whoever did that, the person in charge from the communist camp, they would let them wait there, you know, like sometimes for an hour because they were supposed to be there at 7:00 and they would let them until 8:00, in the cold in winter time just waiting there until their names were called every freaking day. They did it twice a day.

Emma Libohova

And you didn't have to do that?

A

No, no females. Very rarely like one or two. Probably females that I remember, but it was mostly male.

Emma Libohova

Oh, OK.

A

Yeah.

Emma Libohova

So was everybody else in the camp there for the same reasons?

A

No, you know what? They were there for different reasons, mostly was like us, like there were like families of anti-communists or people that had studied abroad like you know like we had people that had studied in Bologna or in Paris in the Sorbonne or whatever. They're very educated and whatever. And they were working in the fields. There were people that would supervise us. They were like, you know, like the brigadiers or whatever. The people responsible for calling our names or the vendors or you know, that lived better. And there were some people that had committed different crimes. Not exactly political crimes that you'd call it, but I remember just to tell you how cruel everything there was right. I'll never forget there was this woman that I worked with sometimes or her daughter's. I worked with her and her daughters. She was older than my mom. Her brother, years later, we found out her brother had been in prison. Condemned for life. Because he supposedly had killed her.

Emma Libohova

Oh.

A

She had escaped and went in hiding and then came to this village where we lived and married. So nobody knew where about her whereabouts. So the people where she lived down South in Albania, they thought that somebody had killed her because they lost trace of her and they accused her brother and the police there, their methods right, They'll beat you so much that he was beat up so much that in order to stop the beating or the torture, he accepted the crime that he had not committed, he said yes. I killed my sister and they sent him to prison for life. And then, you know. Through people that went to prison. They were talking, and 'what's your name?' Oh, from so and so. Yeah, 'we have this woman' that hey whatever, And he's was like, 'that's my sister. That's what I'm in prison for.' They're like, 'no way she's married and has 3 daughters.' And that's how they found out that he was innocent. And even when he was innocent, the government did not acquit him because he was innocent. They just pardoned him.

Emma Libohova

Wow, that's crazy.

A

It is crazy. Another story. There was this old man that came right around the time they arrested my dad, right? I was like 14 years old and never forget him. He was very clean, clean, clean man. You used to see him because there were lines, I told you everyday for water. So used to see him at 5:00 in the morning sometimes, you know at the well because he wanted to be the first to get the water and do his cleaning or whatever. And the story was he had been a student, a medical student in Vienna, and he came after the war came back home, his brothers as well. He came back home and when he saw what the Communists were doing at that time, they were killing people without trials, they were getting all the land and properties from the rich, and taking it for themselves. When he saw what was happening, he tried to escape. No, I'm sorry. I said it wrong. He came after the war in Albania and then they put him in prison. Because a lot of people that would go, you know, who were in colleges, outside in Europe, they had that European influence, Western influence, that was anti communist. So they put a lot of these people in prison. So he did like 10 years in prison. When he came out of prison, he's like, OK, I'm going to escape, I'm not staying here. His two brothers never came back. They were back in Australia. They went to Australia, they became doctors. You know, rich. Whatever. He was in prison for 10 years and he's like, I'm gonna escape. He tried to escape with three people at night. Mistakenly they passed the frontier and they came back to the border, right, without realizing that they had come back and because it was cold, they put on some fire to warm up and that's how they were caught. And he ended up doing 30 years in prison. This man had known nothing in his life, just straight from college. From Vienna. 30 years in prison. And then from there, he came to the concentration camp.

Emma Libohova

He did a circle? So he thought that he had passed the border?

A

Yeah, they passed they border, but you know somehow because it was like, wild terrain right in the woods. So probably they came back again.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

A

They lost direction and they came back and they put on the fire, thinking that they were out, and then they caught them. It was so so terrible. I never forget because he was such a nice man. And he would work, work, work after he came from prison. Oh my God, so terrible.

Emma Libohova

So you remember a lot about the other families and neighbors and everyone?

A

I do. Actually, I do remember. I'm in touch with all my friends from there. A lot of them escaped, you know, and a lot of them are doing very well and some are in France, in Germany, in America. Yeah, they're all doing great.

Emma Libohova

That's good.

A

Yeah.

Emma Libohova

This is at the end, in 1991 and not like before when they escaped?

A

Yeah, 1990, I left, and 91' my sister and everybody came to Italy and then three months later they came here to America with, were given in Italy, what do they call it? Green cards or whatever? Political asylum.

Emma Libohova

How were you able to go out before everybody else?

A

I was married. I was the only way for females. The male could never marry and get out. The wife had to come to wherever they were so, but for females, it was still allowed to get married and go away from your place, so I was married. I was pushed into marriage just to get out of there. I was 18. It was horrible. And the family of my ex-husband was a little bit, they were in a better position than us. So as soon as the Berlin Wall fell, the west started crumbling, and then they gave passports to everybody and I was able to get a passport for Italy.

Emma Libohova

Was he in Italy?

A

Yeah.

Emma Libohova

OK. And then that's how everybody else was able to come after?

A

Then yes, we got them visas for Italy and then from Italy I worked for, I worked as a translator for the immigration office. Actually the director of that office was a friend of my grandfather, so I got a job as a translator there right away in Italy. And they helped me out with all the visas and the process of everybody getting political asylum here. Yeah, we got interviewed at the American Embassy in Rome, and three months later, my siblings came here with my mom, dad, everybody. Yeah. I'm happy we made the decision to come to United States.

Emma Libohova

That's good then. What about, your education in the camp? What was the school like?

A

OK, we were not allowed to go, to none of us to go to, not even middle, I mean, middle school, Yes, but up to 8 years after that, you had to go to work. You were not allowed to go to gymnasium. It was called. It was like a high school. And university, you can't even. No, absolutely not. At 15 I started working, at 15.

Emma Libohova

oh, ok.

A

And yes, because my dad was also in prison when I was 14, they arrested him and many other dads. So all the kids were working to support the family and, you know, we couldn't do anything else but work in the fields. We were not allowed anything else. We were not allowed to go to school. I mean, because we had so many people that were educated in the West, we could learn a lot of things, like I learned French. I learned Italian in private with them, and I would read a lot because they had like incredible books. They didn't have a place to sleep. They didn't have something to eat, but they had books. They had like, all the classics. So I would read and read and read there. It was like self education. Pretty much. It was very good. The school didn't educate me at all. No, I mean me and my sister, we went to FIT when we came here, I got the GED and went to FIT. But in Albania, we couldn't go up to 8 years, we couldn't anything. We just learned everything ourselves, like my grandmother used to call it 'autodidact.' It's like you learn your languages and read, read, read and all that. But you know, like I feel bad because I would have loved to study math and physics. I loved those subjects and I couldn't. And actually, when my mom, my mom took me out early from school and one of the teachers came and, not came, but told, my friend's dad, 'Oh, please tell them not to because she's so good,' blah blah, blah. It's like, 'oh, she has no choice.' Not by choice.

Emma Libohova

Do you remember when your father was arrested?

A

I don't remember much because I was in school and when I came from school I saw my friends, but you know, like it was a period where every 3-4 months they would arrest somebody, and we would know, it was like a black Jeep that would come once in a while because you know there were no cars in Albania, no private cars. Zero. So whenever somebody would see the Jeep from far away, kids would scream, 'Jeep, Jeep, Jeep,' and everybody would know that they were going to arrest somebody. And it was like every four or five months.

Emma Libohova

And was it unannounced, like you didn't know who it would be?

A

No, nobody knew who it would be, so six months earlier they had arrested my uncle and I was there. And when they arrested my dad, I wasn't. It was January 15, so I didn't know I was in school. And when I came back, I just saw my friends that came out and they told me that one of my friend's dads had been arrested. 'Oh, Diana's dad has been arrested' and I was like, you know, petrified. And then, like, slowly, they told me, well, you're dad too. They weren't coming just for one person anymore. They were coming and picking up two.

Emma Libohova

Oh my God.

A

So my dad and somebody else? I remember my mom and my dad and all the women around them, you know, trying to give them support and all that and crying. And I just said, 'Mom, mom' because I was trying to be strong in this moment. I said, 'Don't worry, mom. Don't worry, you got me. You got me.' I was the oldest and I didn't cry, but then I remember when I went to sleep, and there were these pjs that my dad, for first time he had bought Pjs, my mom had bought PJS for him because we couldn't afford much, right? So finally she was able to buy him a pair of PJS, for winter, and I saw them hanging behind the door, and I just went, and I put my face, and I could smell my dad, and I started crying like crazy that night. I didn't cry all day; I was frozen. But then, at night, I cried and cried and cried. It was horrible.

Emma Libohova

That's really sad.

A

You know, and you get used to it slowly. I mean it. It's a process like me and my sister, we would forget, we're children, and we'd forget we were five people in the house, we were four people, with my dad it was five. So when they arrested him, instead of putting 4 plates, we'd put five plates because we'd forget that he's not around. And then we would start crying every night. You know, like putting 5 plates, 5 spoons and then realizing that he's not there. And then we'd start crying. But then you start, you start remembering, you start getting you know, it becomes normal, the absence and all that, and then. You get used to it. But the night when years later, he came back. And it was completely different. I wasn't a child anymore. I had my son, he was a grandfather, he was skinny, he was completely changed, and I remember seeing him in that kitchen and I cried and cried a lot more than when they took him because he was like this. Like, you don't realize all that pain and all that void that it has left. And you get hit with it just when you see it there, you know.

Emma Libohova

So how old were you when he came back?

A

I was 22. My son was just born. I was already a mother when he came back. He left me and by the time he came back, I was already a mother.

Emma Libohova

How old were you when you left like the camp?

A

19.

Emma Libohova

So was this in Italy?

A

No. No, no, the camp I left it when I got married. I'm sorry.

Emma Libohova

So how old were you, 20, 21?

A

When I left Albania, you mean or the camp?

Emma Libohova

Yeah, yeah.

A

Albania, I left it in 91' I came here, so it was in the 90s. In the 90s, I was like 24.

Emma Libohova

OK.

A

I was, yeah, 24 years old. 23 years old, not 24 yet.

Emma Libohova

So your son was born in the camp.

A

No, he was born in Shkodër. He was not in the camp, I told you I married out of the camp.

Emma Libohova

All right. So you got to move away from the camp before you left Albania?

A

Yes.

Emma Libohova

OK. So when did you move to Shkodër?

A

1985. 19 years old. Yeah I was not 20 yet. Yeah.

Emma Libohova

And everybody else was still in the camp?

A

Yes, but then I would take my sister and my brother there for a month. And sometimes, you know, and I would help them out economically and all that.

Emma Libohova

So they were allowed to leave at this point?

A

No, just the the kids.

A

Yes, they could, but not for living, just visiting. They couldn't move to live somewhere else. They were not allowed.

Emma Libohova

But they could visit for a month?

A

Yes, my sister and my brother. Yes, they could when they were little.

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Emma Libohova

And your mom couldn't?

A

She had to work to feed her family.

Emma Libohova

When you worked, do you remember how much you got paid?

A

OK. I don't know it. I mean the values have changed, right?

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

A

The even dollar and everything. But I do remember, let's say my cousin, their grandmother used to send them from Rome every month like \$100 a month and it would be 7000 leke. So we would make, working 30 days half of that. So we would make about, what's today, \$50.

Emma Libohova

\$50.00 in 30 days? That's crazy. Wow.

A

Well, you know, just think about it. If we had one egg a day, we were rich. We never had grams of butter. We never ate meat. I remember my mom always cooking dinner and it was like. 4 spoons, we would measure it. 4 spoons of sunflower oil, 1 spoon of tomato paste, water, salt, and then you put a handful of pasta to make soup with pasta and bread. That was a dinner.

Emma Libohova

Yes, she talked about that.

A

Yeah, that was our mostly dinner, you know.

Emma Libohova

Yeah. Did the camp change at all while you were there, expand? Did they add more buildings or anything?

A

They did two buildings, but those buildings went like the horrible buildings they were. But they went to, and I have pictures of it, they went to whoever was in charge of supervising the people like us, you know.

Emma Libohova

So was it the military that was in charge?

A

People that work. It wasn't a military per se, it was more like police, secret police and it was a whole system that they didn't need military anymore. You know, they had been terrorizing people for 40 years. Who needed military? With everything that they did everyone was so scared.

Emma Libohova

Was it the Sigurimi?

A

Yes, the police. But everybody was so terrified because they had like a year just killing people and imprisoning people and doing all sorts of things and, you know, and that's why they did all the imprisonment, the imprisonments with my dad and his friends. And whatever, because they would scare the population that way and everybody would not, and people would not rebel or protest or anything. There were no protests, nothing because people were scared to death.

Emma Libohova

What was the bathroom like?

A

We had common bathrooms. It was one bathroom on the end of the compound, like ok, There was this compound that had two sides, each side, and they had one wall in the middle, and it was done with mud and like thin bamboo. All the mud. That's how the construction was. Very, very thin walls. I told you, we could hear everything. So it was this compound that had six families on each side. So six families, one side, six families on the other side. And on the end of the compound were those 12 families stayed. Each 6 families had one bathroom.

Emma Libohova

OK.

A

And we didn't even have water, I told you, so we would wait for hours and hours for, so we'd have to get buckets of water to clean the bathroom. And sometimes, you know, it was horrible because six families in one bathroom, it was the worst memory that I have. It's better not to describe it.

Emma Libohova

Yeah, fair. What kind of work did you do?

A

In the fall, you plant. You plant grain. And in fall also we would cultivate, we would collect cotton. You know, and in springtime, it was like vegetables and things we would plant, and then in summer, collecting all of them. Sometimes it was like sunflowers. In summer, it was so difficult or just planting cotton in the spring and planting corn and things like that. You know, it was horrible because you had to cut the grass in between those lines of vegetation because it would go wild, grass would grow and you had to cut the grass and aerate by hand and there would be so much, so much you had to do every day in order to get it was called 'the norm,' right? Like the amount of work you have to do in order to get paid, and sometimes they would come and look at your work and see that you accidentally cut a cotton or two by working and they would call you all kinds of names and 'enemy of the people,' and 'you're sabotaging the socialism' and all that. And you were like 16 years old. You're terrified by them screaming at you as the enemy. And once I remember they would pick on me and my sister a lot because we were so young and undefended. We didn't have anybody. We didn't have brothers well, I mean, my brother was little, nine years younger than me. And my dad and my uncle were in prison, so we were easy targets, right? And they would come and yell at us and and scream the enemies of the people sabotaging this and that. And sometimes they wouldn't take our work, you know, so we wouldn't get paid for all the day's work because you didn't do it properly and worked. Worked so hard. That your, the hands would bleed and then become calluses. I had them for years. I mean, there is still some. From those years of working, you developed this coarse. You bleed and you bleed, and you bleed, and then you become callous. And we're so young, 17 years old, with calluses in our hands, you know, and then they would come and scream at us and not take our work. And we wouldn't even get paid sometimes. And then I remember one woman. She got so mad at them for yelling at us, and there was this guy, an older guy that was like a member of the party. And he started screaming at me and my sister and she just got up. And she's said, 'shame on you, shame on you' because she couldn't take it anymore. 'You're picking on little kids that have no defense? No one to defend them and you're picking on them. Shame on you.' Never forget her. She was such a sweet woman.

Emma Libohova

What happened when she talked back to them?

A

Nothing. He just, you know, he was kind of ashamed, actually for that second. Didn't expect somebody to shame him in public like that. This wasn't heard of. You know, you just took that and and you know, with your head down and you didn't protest. I think so. But he didn't expect it. And all of a sudden, he was ashamed, a little bit in front of all the people.

Emma Libohova

But did people ever talk back like generally, or was it unheard of?

A

No those were rare instances because you know, like they always had an upper hand. So they would come back, could come back at you and torture you for not taking your work or sending you to do very difficult jobs and things like that. So nobody had. It was life and death pretty much. It was survivalism at its worst. You know. I mean islands where people go and do anything to survive. Life was every day like that.

Emma Libohova

Were the guards mean, the police, always rude and mean or did they ever treat you guys ok?

A

Where we lived, we didn't even have the police. They just had those people who would spy. If you dare go anywhere you know. Pass the border. They would spy on you and would arrest people that were not allowed too.

Emma Libohova

Did it feel very crowded in the camp?

A

Not really. I mean families. Yeah. Where we lived like we had this very little space to live with, but, it wasn't crowded in a sense that, ok, they're are 100 family being very, very, very close to each other, but that was good in a way because we didn't have anything else but each other. So we were very close. And we were surrounded by a huge amount of space you know like fields and fields and fields of open space. So you don't

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feel it. It is a prison. But for us, if we were young, it didn't feel like a prison. In prison you are not allowed to do things that other people are allowed to do.

Emma Libohova

Yeah. Do you think that it was different for you because that's all that you knew?

A

Absolutely, I said in the beginning. I mean, as a child you don't know anything else and you know we didn't know the world. That's all we knew. But you know what? When the TV started entering. In late 80s, we started, you know, people started buying, saving money and buying TV's and then we would catch a glimpse of the Western life through Italian TV because in summertime we would have, we were so close to Italy that we would watch the Italian TV. And we would watch all the shows and everything that they showed on TV and it was a different life and all those images and, funny enough, you don't even see, you know, like in the movies you don't see that there is poverty there too, you just see the luxury and the beautiful things and the beautiful cars and the beautiful hair and the beautiful clothing and the beautiful drinks, things that you can't even dream about. And that really people started like seeing the difference and, you know, like not just that, but we also had my grandmother. I had both my grandmothers actually. One was from Spain and the other one had lived, and she had gone a lot to Italy and she had lived a good life, so she would talk a lot about her beautiful things and a beautiful house describe her furniture, her crystal champagne flutes, or the things that the nun had embroidered for her. The furs, hats, things that you know we couldn't imagine. So we knew the existence of those things as we grew up. We're little. No. But as you start growing, you know that there is another world that exists and you're not allowed to even have a glimpse of it, you know, and we're dreaming. We started dreaming for the first time. When we started dreaming my mother always used to call us, she would say, 'oh, you're such a fool for dreaming that.' My dad was different. My dad was always the optimist, and he always, I remember, he would say after every night the sun comes up and there will be a time the sun's gonna come up, you know, and it did.

Emma Libohova

Were you able to move freely and hang out with your friends?

A

Well, we were so many little kids in that camp, right? So we're so close to each other and you go through and it never changes like.

Emma Libohova

Yeah. Even as a teen?

A

Our moms and dads were friends because they only had each other and they've been with each other forever, like since they were kids, since 1945. They were together because they went from camp to camp to camp, you know, always together and then so you know. Our moms and dads are friends. And then you have these kids that grow up together and they go from 1st for from elementary to 8th grade and then they go to work together. So you all your life, you know nothing else but each other and you rely on each other's support like you know like we did weddings together. We did deaths together. We did everything together. So we were so close to each other. And of course we played with each other so much. I told you we didn't have toys. So what you do all day in the field you invent these games and it was fun as a child. It was a lot of fun for those friends that you always have together. From childhood that you can remember from the first days, you can remember to, to adulthood, you know.

Emma Libohova

What were like those events like? Like weddings, funerals? How did they usually go in the camp?

A

We didn't have any clubs or anything. You know, like we couldn't listen to. We didn't have anywhere to go to bars, clubs, things like that. Nothing, it was nonexistent. So those weddings were the only time that we could celebrate something. Life, you know. Have a different perspective in life. And the weddings would go like 3 days and we would get somebody that would hire some, some group that would play the harmonica or some songs and something and it would go for three days. We couldn't stop until 5:00 in the morning. It was fun. It was the only occasion that we were allowed to gather and celebrate with music and dance and all that.

Emma Libohova

Was this outside the barracks?

A

Yeah, yeah. At somebody's home and somebody's backyard, you know, little backyard, they had. They would put this long tables get everybody tables and put them together and drink for the occasion and, pretty rare occasions. But you know, very memorable for us that were young. To dance, and see our parents dance. You know that movie *Life is Beautiful*. Like you, you find, you make beauty everywhere. You find beauty everywhere.

Emma Libohova

How did like just being there make you feel though? In the camp.

A

Ah. Oh, I said it before. Right, when you're little, it's like the normal thing. You don't know anything but your mom and your dad. Then when you grow up, you start dreaming, you know? And I told you, I said we start seeing Italian TV and we read books. Although the books that we read were all classical, we weren't allowed to have contemporary literature from the West. Only the classics, but that was great, actually, this is a great education, but you grow up and you start seeing this western life, you know from Italian TV and movies and things and start dreaming. And the music, we would learn Italian songs or French. We'd watch the Eurovision. It was like a different planet. I mean seriously like a different planet, like dreaming of going to Mars. That's how it was. Seriously. It's always that feeling of wanting, you know, of not having, of wanting, not just wanting things, wanting to do things, to live, to learn everything. You start seeing all the limitations when you start growing up, right? But at the same time, the more they kept it away from you, the more you wanted it. The more you'll fight for it. More you want it.

Emma Libohova

Do you think that men and women had different experiences? Was there any differences?

A

The difference was that a lot of men went to prison, and they did put a lot of women too, but mostly men from our side, from our class. It was like the class that had been rich, had some power, and that were anti-communists. And they went generation after generation. Like for me it had been my grandfather. I had nothing to do. I never had power. I never had a position. I never had, you know, nor had my father. And it was like that for everybody else. A lot of people had never had any power. Their parents had had some power, some government job or were anti-communist, or had some kind of rich properties, that made them considered the enemy of the people. And, what was the question?

Emma Libohova

What were the differences between men's and women's experiences?

A

They put a lot of men in prison and that was harsh. It was terrible. They killed a lot of them, a lot of priests, a lot of men in the beginning, 1945 to 50s without trial. So it was terrible too. But women, women were left with all the burden of taking care of the family. All the kids on their own, you know, and, going to see their husbands in prison, too, sometimes, many times. Like my mom and her friends. Besides being, you know left in those harsh conditions, a husband and wife cannot make a living, then all of a sudden that path is gone and these women are left on their own with three or four children when they're not capable of supporting the family with their husbands, now they're on their own, even worse. And then we, as children had to start working. It was very difficult for women, I can't imagine. Like my mom having to, I remember her most of the time, she had headaches. So most of the time, I remember her with her eyes, you know, swollen and red from crying at night. It's difficult. On top of that, you have to clean cook. Have to. Life goes on. There were kids that expected food from you, they expected clean clothing. So yeah.

Emma Libohova

How did living in the camp affect your health, both physically and mentally?

A

Basically, my sister, was so skinny, and I remember she always used to say that she'd come from school and open the cupboard, we had this tiny little cupboard in the kitchen. It had nothing, just empty jars. She would come from school and look for something to eat, and there was nothing. And you can see the pictures. I mean, she was skin and bones. And those big eyes, you know, I mean, we were like, Third World kids, really. And, later on, mentally too, I mean, there we didn't have any options so I didn't do much maybe. But when we came to the West, it took a while to integrate, you know, and to have that mental strength, to know what you want and to find some equilibrium, you know, sometimes. It was very difficult because we were pretty much like animals kept in a cage, and then all of a sudden in the free world. We were afraid to go, me and my sister were so young in the beginning, I remember. And we were just so intimidated to go to the bar and ask for a drink, we didn't know how to ask. Everything became, it was so complex and complicated and difficult. Simple things. And then slowly, without realizing you learn everything. And you integrate and you forget all of it. But it was difficult mentally. It was very difficult to know what you want. Who you are. What are the outside world's values. I mean, we have no gauges.

Emma Libohova

Do you think some of these things still affect you today?

A

Probably, most probably. I mean, I'm pretty much integrated now after 30 years, you know, I consider myself one of the many. But I do have that baggage. I do have a lot of knowledge, experience, all of it. The influence has been negative and positive, in a way that every time something happens, threatening or you're in a difficult position. You're just like, ok, I've been, I have the worst. It's never gonna be that. So whatever it is, it's not gonna be that I can make it. So it gives you strength in a way, but also there is regret. Regret for childhood not lived properly. Youth more than childhood. Childhood. We didn't know much, but we didn't live our youth at all. We had no youth, so there is so much regret. And we're thankful at the same time for being able to get out of it.

Emma Libohova

Have you tried to seek justice or support from the government?

A

No. Once I left Albania and I saw how things were going. I mean in Albania, it's mostly that the sons of dictators are in charge. So supposedly their revision themselves. Of course they like what capitalism gave them. The money, the properties, the luxury cars, so of course. And they're the ones, you know. So who am I going to ask, and what am I going to get? Nobody can give me what is gone, you know.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

A

Money doesn't pay for that. What's gone is gone.

Emma Libohova

Do you think Albania has done enough to recognize what happened in these camps?

A

They have tried somewhat. They have tried. There are memorials. There are places where my grandmother and my dad and my uncle and the rest of the family spent their time, our names, everything. There are different memorials, different institutions. But like I said. We were the only ones, and it's gone, that time is gone. Nothing can bring it back. No matter what is done. It wasn't just us. It was many, you know, like in the Soviet Union, there were 20 million killed. And we were just discussing about something else the other day with my husband. But, I don't know how the saying goes, but it's like, when there is one, everybody cries, and when there are 10 of them. But when it's hundreds of thousands, it's just a number. The suffering becomes nothing you know, it's just a number, when there's too many. And that's how we were. So many of us. Thousands. It just becomes something in history that is mentioned.

Emma Libohova

What do you want others to know about the camps besides what you've already said, if anything?

A

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that it existed and it was done all in the name of equality. You know, and equal distribution, socialism, communism. That's what it represents. It's done in the name of ideas. And people have to look hard at history. What do those ideas bring? I mean, do people live with practical rules or do people live with ideas? Ideas many times, you know, what is it saying? The road to hell is paved with good intentions, right? People come up with this grand idea, saying we're gonna change the world. And then those ideas become so Machiavellian where everything is justified and they start killing innocent people and everything is supposed to achieve that idea. But even one human life has value, and no ideas can justify the killing of not even one person. And I think the world never learns because we weren't the first ones. There always have been things like that during the French Revolution. It was during the Holocaust. We weren't the first ones. People don't learn. People keep doing that, you know, sacrificing innocent people in the name of an idea. And it's not right.

Emma Libohova

Is there a lesson you hope people learn from your experience?

A

You cannot kill innocent people. You cannot justify the killing of not even one person. For an illusion, for an idea.

Emma Libohova

Is there anything else you want to add, any last remarks?

A

I was one of the lucky ones. I mean, I guess in life everything is an experience, and we have a very, I don't know, I sometimes consider myself lucky even with that experience now. Because you learn all these things from these experiences. I mean, no matter how brutal they are. It's like you're a character in your own novel. You know what I mean? And you have such a dramatic. Experience and then it all changes and slowly becomes better and better and better. It's a desired outcome. You know.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

A

I was lucky, even with those experiences.

Emma Libohova

So you were optimistic.

A

Very optimistic. And I'm not because I mean look at you kids.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

A

You studying are in colleges living the world. Like everybody else, I mean.

Emma Libohova

Turned out ok in the end.

A

Exactly. You know, we were. We were not allowed to dream when we were young. And you kids can dream and make it possible, everything.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

A

It's two different worlds, and I lived both of them so. It's great.

APPENDIX B

Interview with Participant B (Age 82) on the 2nd of January 2025 for 1 hour.

Albanian man who was interned in Concentration camps and Prisons in Communist-era Albania.

Emma Libohova

What can you tell me about before you went into the camp?

B

Before I went to the camp? I don't remember because I went to the camp when I was two years old.

Emma Libohova

What camp was that?

B

They sent us in the beginning to the city of Berat and Kucove and sent us around to many other concentration camps.

Emma Libohova

Were you in Tepelena?

B

Yes.

Emma Libohova

How long?

B

It was like this. They sent us to one camp. Then after six months, they moved us from one camp to another camp and to Tepelena, which was the most terrible camp like Auschwitz. Over there were only older women, some older men, and kids. And treatment and food was terrible. So one night over there 300 kids died. Because nobody took care of them. I think it was typhus. From typhus fever over 300 kids died in one night in Tepelena.

Emma Libohova

What is your earliest memory of the camp?

B

Oh, my earliest memory of the camp? I think my earliest memory of the camp is in Tepelena. And when my grandmother died. We were kids because we had been with my brother. He was older than me by five years, and my cousin. They are the same age as me. And we didn't understand what had happened. We saw people crying. I saw people crying in the corner, but we had to play, we were kids. And later on, I remember this thing and I don't know. This is life.

Emma Libohova

Could you describe what the camp looked like from the outside?

B

It was a military camp for the Italian army. After, they turned it into a concentration camp. There were barracks where hundreds and hundreds of people together slept together in these beds that were straight from corner to corner. And it was like if you have ever seen movies about concentration camps, it was like this. Something like this. Not completely like this because it was missing the gas chamber (talking about the Albanian camp compared to other concentration camps).

Emma Libohova

What were the buildings made like? Do you remember?

B

They were barracks the Italians built for the army. They turned them into concentration camps. When the military made the camps, they were careful to cover every corner, but it's the same thing like prisons in Albania; they cover any corner not to see outside. From inside to outside, from outside inside.

Emma Libohova

If something broke who had to fix it? Was it the guards or was it prisoners?

B

They used prisoners for everything. To do hard jobs and everything, just prisoners. The guards were like princes over there. They had our lives in their hands.

Emma Libohova

Were they harsh and mean to the prisoners or were they ever nice?

B

Yeah, they are mean because I don't know, maybe they were ignorant or what happened to them, but they were the same every time. I can tell you one memory. My cousin was the same age as me, and he took some watermelon that fell that was outside. The guards ate and threw out the rest. And he took one of them. They punished him the whole night, tied up the whole night.

Emma Libohova

Could you have any personal items with you?

B

Not really, because we didn't have anything to save from there.

Emma Libohova

Because you were moved around a lot?

B

Yes, we moved around a lot because after Tepelene they chose some people, special people they think, with the name, and they sent us to Porto Palermo, near Himare. Porto Palermo was a castle built by Ali Pasha of Tepelena in this 18th century, I think, 19 or 18 century. 18, I think. And it was an army castle. With walls and 2-3 yards. And they sent us over there. And we were women and kids and they sent us there. Do you know about Alexander Dumas? Alexander Dumas wrote The Count of Monte Cristo.

Emma Libohova

Oh Ok.

B

In The Count of Monte Cristo Alexander Dumas put this guy in jail for many years in a castle. They sent us, kids, to a castle. They sent and closed us in the castle over there.

Emma Libohova

How old were you?

B

I was seven.

Emma Libohova

OK.

B

Almost 7.

Emma Libohova

And this is in Himare?

B

This was close to Himare, maybe 7 miles. Something like this.

Emma Libohova

Was this camp any different than Tepelena? Were the camp conditions the same? Like how you slept?

B

Same thing. They don't care for us. They didn't treat us like humans. They treated us like the enemy. I didn't know what enemy meant when I was two years old until seven years old, but they treated us like this.

Emma Libohova

Were you able to sleep with your family? Like, stay with them. Or did you have to be separated?

B

No, we were together. In Tepelena and Porto Palermo, but when I slept, I remember that mom put stones under the mattress to lift it up from the floor because the floor was covered in water.

Emma Libohova

Were you with any other families inside the room?

B

With me? I was with my mom, my nephew, my mother's sister-in-law, and her daughter. And there were other families. Not too many in Porto Palermo. They chose some families.

Emma Libohova

Was it cold when it was in winter and was it really hot in the rooms in summer?

B

The castle had no glass, no windows; they were like a tunnel for two, three, four yards, and we slept over there. If you go today to visit, you can see my name, my brother's name, and my cousin's name written in cement.

Emma Libohova

Where were the toilets? And were they clean?

B

My mom and the older ladies tried to keep us clean with the conditions we had. But they tried. I don't know. Zgjebe (Albanian word), do you know what that means? A sickness for the skin.

Emma Libohova

Scabies?

B

Yes. Yes there was scabies there and you would scratch.

Emma Libohova

Were the toilets far? Were they far from where you slept?

B

We would go behind the castle, hide behind a stone or something.

Emma Libohova

So there was no actual bathroom?

B

No. Over there have been some rooms. King Zog built them for prisoners, but they had everything. Water, bathroom, shower, everything inside. They were only missing the roof. But they sent us in the castle, not to them, to put on the roof and to let us live like humans. They didn't treat us like humans. They treat us, I told you, like the enemy. I was only 7 years old. I didn't know what enemy meant. But they treated us like this because they had to scare other people.

Emma Libohova

So you didn't have any bathrooms or anything?

B

No, no bathroom. We had to go outside. Find a place where you can hide.

Emma Libohova

Was there anywhere you could cook?

B

No, no. We had some food that people brought us. But they bought dry things. Cheese, some dry meat. Things like this. So it was not to cook.

Emma Libohova

Was there any place where people could go if they got sick or injured?

B

No, nobody was.

Emma Libohova

Nobody helped?

B

No. Look, but I have to tell you something. If I can explain.

Emma Libohova

Ok.

B

Close to this castle, Porto Palermo, was a village, Qeparo. They cultivated oranges usually and other things. Any Sunday those guys came to the castle and would sell us oranges, figs, whatever they had. But they didn't sell it. They gave it to us. But they acted like they were selling because the guards were watching, and in reality, they didn't sell. They gifted us.

Emma Libohova

That's nice.

B

They are very, very good people.

Emma Libohova

People could come into the camp to sell stuff to you?

B

No. How can I explain? The castle is inside the sea. They came to the street which was 2-300m far from the castle. We would go to them to buy something. The guards stay there watching us. We would get water. My mom and her friends would go over there to buy something, but they never took their money.

Emma Libohova

The only contact you had with people outside of the camp was guards and people selling food?

B

Yes, or maybe sometimes close family came to watch us, to see us. But it was very hard because in this time there was no street, no road, nothing. If you start from Tirana, it took seven days to come to us. So they didn't come very often.

Emma Libohova

But they were allowed?

B

Yeah, they were allowed to come visit the prisoners once a month.

Emma Libohova

OK, so you could have visitors?

B

Yeah, but who? No people came once a month. They came once every six months.

Emma Libohova

What kind of work did you have to do?

B

At this time I was seven years old. I had no work. And for women and men who were there, there was no job, they were in prison. No, no job there.

Emma Libohova

So they didn't do anything?

B

No, nothing.

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Emma Libohova

What about in any of the other camps that you were in?

B

In Tepelena my mom went every day in the mountain to get wood for heating. Every day they sent her to the mountain. But I had been five, six years old. I was not able to work. Work we had to do when I was in prison.

Emma Libohova

And what work was that?

B

In prison I worked in a mine. Copper mine.

Emma Libohova

And how long did you work for a day?

B

8 hours, because they work with three shifts, eight hours each shift, but they used us like animals.

Emma Libohova

How did you travel to work there? In the mine?

B

In Spac. We had to walk 600 steps to go to work. It was terrible. And you had to walk with another guy together, hand to hand. I was in prison and I had to work in the mine.

Emma Libohova

They didn't drive you or anything? You had to walk to the mine to work?

B

Yes, 600, I tell you, 600 steps in the mountain to reach the top.

Emma Libohova

Did you get any breaks?

B

The break. They said we have to work six days by rules, from Monday to Saturday and Sunday to not work, but they never let us relax because Sunday, they said "Today is Enver Hoxha day" you have to work voluntarily. Everything was voluntary to work.

Emma Libohova

So you didn't have to work? Was it just that one day you had a break?

B

By rules yes, but never.

Emma Libohova

They never let you have it?

B

Never allowed.

Emma Libohova

Did you get water while you worked?

B

No, they didn't let us. When we were sent from the prison to mine, they didn't let us take anything because they were afraid if we get the food, the water, or something like this, we would one day find some way to escape. So they didn't let us have anything.

Emma Libohova

How did the guards keep watch while you worked?

B

I don't know how I can explain to you how the organization is, but if you have seen any concentration camp movies, you can see one guard and the people go behind him, and he would send three people here, 5 people there, and you have to do like this, everything, because if you don't do it you can get handcuffed and beaten.

Emma Libohova

In the actual prison, was there any communal area where you could all go? Like an open yard?

B

Yes, you could move over there in this area. It was a small area. We had been in Spac 1200 people, more. And the area was for 300 people, not for 1200.

Emma Libohova

And the prisons were only men, right?

B

Sure, the women prisoners were all in another place.

Emma Libohova

There was another prison for women besides just the camps?

B

They sent the women to another place. One near Kosovo. Not in Kosovo. In the village Lushnja.

Emma Libohova

Oh, OK. That's where your wife was, right? And daughter and everyone? In Lushnja?

B

My daughter was born in a concentration camp.

Emma Libohova

In Gradishte, right?

B

Gradishte. They didn't let her go after 7 years old to class. Not more. No high school, nothing. She did it by herself when she came to America to complete the school and everything. But she was born in concentration camp Gradishte. She was hungry all the time, because they only gave us enough food to stay alive.

Emma Libohova

In the prisons and in the camps, were there any place for people to pray like a church or anything like that?

B

Church? If you make the cross you get 10 years in prison.

Emma Libohova

Really.

B

Yes, really. They executed one priest because he baptized one kid.

Emma Libohova

So you had to hide it if you were religious?

B

Oh, sure, we had to hide it. If you wanted to make the cross you had to check around. Because nobody can see me and I do it and go ahead.

Emma Libohova

In any of the camps that you were in, was it open to the outside or were there fences blocking you in?

B

No. Fences were when I got sent to prison. There was a fence in Tepelena, from '49 to '54. Porto Palermo didn't need the fence because it was isolated. You can't move from there. After in Gradishte, we had to work in the field. So, no fence there. But the fence was not physical, it was mental because if I get out of the area we can go to prison.

Emma Libohova

So the guards were always watching then to see?

B

In prison, they watched you closely with a guard who was in this tower. Around the fence were towers and there were guards. And if you go close and if you passed this red line, they killed you. So we had been careful not to pass this red line. In Gradishte, no.

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Gradishte was a 900-acre space. We had to move around because we had to work. They let us work over there, so we have to go around. But if I got out of this area then I would have a problem.

Emma Libohova
What would they do?

B
They would send you to prison. They treated you like you escaped.

Emma Libohova
So, all the camps you were in were in different parts of Albania, right? Like, it was in the South, north?

B
I left Albania at the age of 49. So for 49 years I lived in Albania, but I did not know Albania because I was all the time inside the concentration camp or in jail. I didn't know. I know Tirana, a little. Yes, I know Tirana, a little bit Shkodër, and nothing else. My cousin saw the sea for the first time when he was 47 years old.

Emma Libohova
How many camps were you in?

B
How many camps?

Emma Libohova
Yes, and prisons?

B
Prisons I was in Spac and Qafë Bar. And concentration camps: I was in Gradishte. I was in Tepelena. I was in Porto Palermo. I was in Berat. I was in Kuçovë. I was in Shijak. I was in Valias. I don't know, maybe another place, but who could remember all this?

Emma Libohova
Were they all in the South?

B
Almost. The worst were in the South. Some were close to Tirana. In the north there was always prisons, not concentration camps.

Emma Libohova
So the north had more prisons and the south had more camps.

B
They didn't choose, they didn't care. They put from the south, from the north. But prisons were in the north usually. Occasionally they make some prison in the south to work, but usually they work in this middle area of Albania. They use prisoners for jobs. They used us like slaves. They don't care for anything else.

Emma Libohova
Were all the camps the same? The same living conditions and everything?

B
I think same.

Gradishte was different, a little bit, because in Gradishte we had family. And I told you all my kids, they were born over there. You have family over there who work and try to live. But the other camps, concentration camps, were all the same thing. Tepelene and Porto Palermo were terrible, the worst. Prison was the same in every place. Qafë Bar, Spac, everything was the same.

Emma Libohova
Do you know when Gradishte opened?

B
They opened in '54. Closed the Tepelena camp because international news talked about this camp. So they closed this camp and sent us in Lushnjë. Lushnjë we were there in '54, I think. They sent us.

Emma Libohova
You and your family?

B
My mom and my family. In '50, in 1950, me and my brother, who had been let to go out of the camp. So my aunt took me and took care of me for 10 years. This period of time I lived in Tirana.

Emma Libohova
You lived in Tirana for 10 years?

B
Yes. I lived in Tirana for 10 years, and in this time I finished in school for construction technician, vice engineer. And when I reached the age of 16, they took me again and sent me again to a camp.

Emma Libohova
What camp was that?

B
Gradishte. In Lushnjë there had been many camps: Gradishte, Savër, Gjazë. A lot of villages they would make the camps in. Because they don't like to gather too many people in one place. And Gradishte was the worst. Gradishte was the worst. They chose the people to send in Gradishte, not occasionally, but they choose.

Emma Libohova
How long were you there for? Before you were sent to prison?

B
Totally, if you ask me totally, I did 37 years in concentration camps and jail—37 years. In Gradishte I had been from '60 to '90. Gradishte, yes. I told you 16. I should have been 18 when they sent me to Gradishte. I lived there with my family from '60 to '90. But in this period I was almost 10 to 8 years in prison and my wife and my 3 kids lived without me. This had been a very terrible time for them.

Emma Libohova
So you were in prison when they were in the camp, right?

B
That they were in camp Gradishte, I was in prison.

Emma Libohova
When did you go to the prison?

B
In 1980.

Emma Libohova
So 20 years after being sent to Gradishte?

B
Yes.

Emma Libohova
OK. And what was that for?

B
Agitation and Propaganda. Like. You are an enemy, people's enemy.

Emma Libohova
Enemy of the state?

B
Enemy of the state. You are against communism, you are against the government. And like this. Political.

Emma Libohova
Did they have any actual reason to arrest you, or did they make it up?

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B

No, they made it up, everything, because I was not stupid to talk to anybody. If I talked, I talked to my wife, I talked to close friends, but it didn't come from them; it came from ordinary people. They made it up, everything. I was in a concentration camp. How could I go against the government? How can I damage the government?

Emma Libohova

So when you were in Gradishte did you have anywhere you could live as a family?

B

You lived in barracks. We had one room. Me, my wife, my 3 kids. Just one room and most of the time we had no door. We got out from the window. You know, because in the other room, there was some other family.

Emma Libohova

Did you have a kitchen there?

B

We cooked with a gas furnace, I don't know. And, later on, me and my oldest daughter built a kitchen outside the home. A small kitchen, but it was excellent for us; it was like a palace.

Emma Libohova

What about bathrooms? Was it the same as the other camp?

B

Yeah, it was terrible here. There were four barracks, and any barracks had maybe 7-8 families on one side and on another side six or seven. So around 15 families, they had one bathroom outside. In winter, in spring, you had to go outside. It was 30 yards outside and was very dirty. There was no drain, just one deposit, and was very dirty.

Emma Libohova

How did you get water?

B

Water, sometimes they would bring it with a carriage and people would go take two liters, three liters. Later on they built one fountain. But there was little water. My wife and daughter would go to wash after 12:00 because it was empty.

Emma Libohova

What about food? How did you get food?

B

Food, in a store. We had a store but the store had nothing. We had ration tickets. And we had one or two kilograms of macaroni, pasta. One or two liters of oil. And sometimes, 50 grams of coffee, sometimes. And water and milk we had sometimes. Sometimes we had a liter of milk. But it was terrible.

Emma Libohova

How did you get money?

B

I told you we worked in the field.

Emma Libohova

They paid you?

B

Yes, we worked in the field. When I worked in the field, I got paid. But they tried to torture us. And it was very, very hard to get to leave. I remember one New Year, we had nothing at home, nothing. And my wife, I sent my wife to her family in the city because we lied to her. Sent her over there. And me and my brother and my daughter, we stayed there and we had nothing to give to her because it's New Year (her birthday). For one gift, and my brother come around, around, around and got one friend and got 5 leke, like \$0.05, and bought one dreidel. We had been very happy because we gifted my daughter a 5-cent gift.

Emma Libohova

So you were able to leave the camp then?

B

Not to leave the camp, only this area. Where you work, not outside the area.

Emma Libohova

So how did your wife go to her family? How was she able to visit her family?

B

Because she was not like me. She came voluntarily over there. They didn't bring her. She came because she came after me.

Emma Libohova

So she could leave whenever she wanted if she wanted to?

B

Not really. Technically yes, but in reality no.

Emma Libohova

Did you need permission if you wanted to leave?

B

Me?

Emma Libohova

Anybody.

B

Me and my mom and my brother. Sure, we needed permission, but we can't. They never gave permission to leave. But my kids, they could move. But where can they go?

Emma Libohova

Did they ever come to visit you in prison?

B

Yes, they came. They came. It was a big sacrifice to come.

Emma Libohova

Why?

B

Because they had to travel maybe two days to come in the mountain of Spac and Qafë Bar. They came with these trucks. They really are heroines.

Emma Libohova

Did you have any contact with anybody? Like could you write letters?

B

Yes, and I have saved all my letters I sent to my wife and kids. They saved it. I have all the letters I sent to them and I bring from the prison. Later they sent to me. I have these letters. All these letters, I have it.

Emma Libohova

How did you feel when you were in the camp?

B

Oh, I don't know. What can I tell you? All the time I dream all the time. I dream to fly, to be free. But, I was never able to do like this. I dreamed to feel free air. I didn't have free air till 50 years old. I had been almost 50 years old when I left Albania. I left Albania because I needed air. I was suffocated.

Emma Libohova

Have you ever gone back to see the camp after your release?

B

Yes, and I have been in Gradishte. Almost every time I went to Albania, I went to the Gradishte. I don't know in Stockholm they call this when you get stuck to your place where you suffered. I went to Gradishte but never went to Spac and Qafë Bari. No, because I went to visit Albania for 3-4 weeks and I have no time to go around. I have been to Tepelena. And I was planning to go to Porto Palermo because in Porto Palermo I proposed, and they approve, I think, to put one sign in front when you enter the castle: "Here have been prisoners. Kids, women and older men."

Emma Libohova

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You proposed this to the government?

B

Yes, I think they approved. But I was not able to follow and I don't know if they put it or not yet.

Emma Libohova

So this answers my next question, but do you think these buildings should be kept as a memorial or destroyed?

B

Well, they have to keep it as a memorial because people have no right to forget. Because if you forget, you risk to repeat the same thing. And what I saw today actually, people, I think usually in the West, they forget what's happened in the East. They didn't try and prove and they forget what's happened. Albania is a small country. And where 30,000 people I think. There were 30,000 people in prison. It's a small country. But in Russia, there were millions. In China, there are millions. In Cambodia, there were millions. And people forget — the West people.

Emma Libohova

When you were in the camp what was your biggest problem?

B

When I was in the camp my problem every day was to have food for my kids. This was a big problem. And in prison, my problem was what can you do in prison? You just have to pass the day.

Emma Libohova

How did you pass the day?

B

You passed the day every day by counting how many days you remember. Five years, four years, three years, two years. Same thing every day.

Emma Libohova

How did you deal with that?

B

You have to. I had no choice. Nobody give you a choice to try or to prove something else. You have to do what you have to.

Emma Libohova

How did living in the camp affect your health, both physically and mentally?

B

I don't know how many times me and my friend, close friends, asked ourselves, "How are we alive? How can I talk? How?" But people are very strong. Humans are very strong. The human can survive anything. Anything. You can survive anything if you don't change. If you don't do like a snitch, if you don't do like stupid people. But if you stay sane you can do anything. You can pass everything, everything.

Emma Libohova

How were you finally released from the camp?

B

I was released from the camp because communism collapsed like in all of Europe. Like in Russia and all the eastern countries. In the end, Albanian communism collapsed. When it collapsed, I came to Italy with my family. From there I applied for political asylum in the USA. But they approve anyway. They approve easily for us because they know who we are.

Emma Libohova

What was it like after leaving the camp, trying to return to normal life?

B

You can never be the same. Look, when I was young, I had dreams, I had aspirations to make this, to do this, to study, but after 50 years, when you turn 50, you see a lot of things you can't do anymore. You can just try to adapt to the new life. To live. Nothing more. There's no dreams. Dreams are gone.

Emma Libohova

Have you tried to seek justice or support from the government?

B

It's a very complicated situation in my country. We are free to talk. We are free to blame the government for everything, but real democracy didn't come. In Germany, when the Nazis collapsed, they sent them to Nuremberg to punish them for their crimes. In Albania this didn't happen. Instead, they are in government right now, again. Some of them tortured us. They are in government.

Emma Libohova

So do you think Albania has done enough to recognize what happened in these camps?

B

No, no, they haven't.

Emma Libohova

Not even today?

B

Not even close.

Emma Libohova

OK. So just to finish it off, is there anything else you want people to know about these camps?

B

I don't know. Do you know who Anne Frank is?

Emma Libohova

Yes.

B

She ended the diary with this sentence, "people don't forget. Never forget," and I tell whoever has to see this: Don't forget. Your enemy. My enemy, enemy to humans, is behind the door. They play very nicely, they promise everything, but you have to take in your mind, if somebody talks to your stomach, get away from them. If somebody talks to your mind, stay with them. But, many of political leftists, usually they talk into the stomach. You need to eat, but watch if they're talking to the mind, we say you are to support them. If they talk into the stomach, forget them. Go far from them. And don't ever forget because they can repeat to everybody. Nobody's immune from these things.

Emma Libohova

And lastly, is there a lesson you hope people learn from your experience?

B

I hope so. I have nothing else to do. Only to tell the truth.

APPENDIX C

Interview with Participant C (Age 78) on the 2nd of January 2025 for 51 minutes.

Albanian woman who was interned in Gradishte camp, an Internment camp in Communist-era Albania.

Emma Libohova

How old were you when you went to the camp?

C

I was 18 year old.

Emma Libohova

And why did you go to the camp?

C

I went to the camp because I loved my husband. And I need this boy. And I went to the camp to live with him.

Emma Libohova

And where did you live before you went to the camp?

C

I was in the city name Lushnjë. My father was over there. He had from the government, isolation to stay in this city. Lushnjë, it's not a camp but he couldn't move from the city.

Emma Libohova

What did he do?

C

He was in prison at this time when I got married. My father was in prison. For 10 years. Because he was a general, And the the dictator. didn't want him because he was against what the dictator was doing at this time. And he talk and he took his uniform and he put it on the floor and said I don't want this.

C

He said I don't want this. I didn't go to war for this. I go for the people to live good. To be free, to have democracy. And when he saw it was different, what he did, Enver Hoxha, he was against it. And for this he went to prison for 10 years.

Emma Libohova

What was your earliest memory of the camp that you can remember?

C

My first memory of the camp was when I went over there and I saw the barracks and when I walked my boots got stuck, it was raining and it was muddy. And I can't walk to go. And when I see there I was surprised.

Emma Libohova

So how did you feel when you arrived there?

C

What did I feel? I felt like I was in another world.

Emma Libohova

Were you scared?

C

It's different, you know. In this time I don't think too much. I was so young. I was so young. I don't think—if I think, today I saw a picture of my husband when he was young, 22 year old. He's over there. And when I saw him, he was coming back from work in this picture and I say how crazy I was to love this guy. This guy is a very, very good guy but to see him like this, How did I love him, you know.

Emma Libohova

Can you describe what the camp looked like from the outside?

C

When I went to the camp there was the 4 barracks. 4 and 4. When I see outside. It was big land, you know.

Emma Libohova

Yeah, a field.

C

Yes, big land. And I didn't know what it was. Was flower or Grain or I don't know, you know. And it was nothing over there, nothing.

Emma Libohova

Nothing in the field.

C

Nothing.

Emma Libohova

How was your room that you stayed in?

C

In my room, my husband, he explained to you before. I go there in this room. My mother-in-law lived with two sons. And she didn't have a door. She had a door but this door was connected to the other room, and this other room is some other family. And the room where I live. I go to live, was my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law, my husband and me and the no door. We entered from window. And one day I entered from the window and I fell from this window and I was pregnant.

Emma Libohova

You fell when you were pregnant.

C

Yes, it was the 1st and I lost the baby. Because I fell from this window cause it was wet, it was winter.

Emma Libohova

You had a miscarriage.

C

Yes before my daughter.

Emma Libohova

So how many beds did you have in the room?

C

There where two, not a bed, Couches. It was two couches like an L shape and that's it. And I sleep for 20 days on the floor, and my husband slept on the floor. I slept on the couch and my mother-in-law on the other couch. After 20 day I married. But in this time they can't permit marriage in December. And after 20 day I made it with my husband and my mother-in-law and my brother-in-law, he went to go sleep in apartments where there was construction, it was empty. You know, not forever, for the moment.

Emma Libohova

Was this different from where you lived in Lushnjë with your family?

C

It was very different. Because I wasn't in a camp. I was free where I was, you know. I was young and my family, my mother had a good condition, not like this, you know. I never in my home missed something for eating or for nothing.

Emma Libohova

So you sacrificed all of that for your husband?

C

Yeah. Sacrificed for my husband. But I love him and I saw him and he was a beautiful boy, very elegant boy, and I loved him from the first time I saw him and he loved me. And thanks God. In my life, I never asked why I did this, you know. Because he was a very good, man, a very good father, and I never complained for nothing. For nothing.

Emma Libohova

What were the toilets like?

C

Oh my God. Oh my God, they were terrible. I needed to walk in the night time to go to the bathroom. And the bathroom was on small barrack. It's four bedroom over there, you know. And when I would go there, I needed to stay to wait and hear if somebody was there because I couldn't see cause there was a wall. And I stayed over there, I waited them to go out so I could finish what I needed to do. It was terrible to go there. And to go there the walk was not easy. You could fall in the water in the canal. and I take and put my boots on, I had beautiful boots. I put my boots and I go on the stones on the canal. And when you put your feet wrong you go down and you need to take off the boots. It was terrible.

Emma Libohova

Was there enough water to drink and for washing?

C

No, no water over there, to go, to wash I go to the fountain. I needed to walk. I had to have two buckets to go there to take the water and to come again the street was terrible to go home. This was the winter time it was terrible. And wash everything with hands at 11:00 at night I go and to wash the clothes. Everything I had. very bad life over there. Very bad life. When I'm thinking, I say, how can people survive like this? You know when my husband was in prison, I couldn't cut the wood. I couldn't do it. You had 2-3 outside and I couldn't cut the wood and I had three kids. Two girls and a boy. And this year the winter was very hard and I never had a fire or something to put my kids to to stay warm. I didn't have heat that year. I didn't have heat. It was very cold in the winter.

Emma Libohova

How did you sleep with your kids and everybody when it was just the four of you?

C

Yeah. When I was with my kids everybody would fight on who would go first in the bed. Because the bed was very, very, very cold you know. And my daughters would fight saying 'you go, no you go' and when they would get into bed they would go like this (hugs self to keep warm) you know, to keep warm.

Emma Libohova

But you all shared a bed?

C

No, I had my bed. because after, when my kids where born, I took one other room. The other room that the other family had, you know, and everybody had a bed. I had with my husband and my son was little so he had a bed close to me, and my daughters had a bed in the other room.

Emma Libohova

And so you had two rooms then?

C

Yes. In this time, yes. And I had one kitchen outside. It's like small, my husband did it with my daughter.

Emma Libohova

So what happened when people got sick?

C

When my kids got sick. I took them and put them on my back and I go for one hour to the doctor.

Emma Libohova

Did you walk?

C

I walked for one hour with the kids on my back. I go to the doctor, and thank God the doctor This time, the doctor was very, very good. Every time, he gave me three days off. Don't go to work. You know to stay with your kids. He was a very, very good man. Yeah, like this one hour there and one hour to come back, and in the summertime it was very hot. Very very hot. And the kids On back to come back home. And when you come back home, you needed to think what you eating. And what is there to eat? Eating one soup with three spoons of oil, if you had. Not olive oil, vegetable oil. And two hands with macaroni and make soup. And this was the dinner for the kids. The other day was beans. The other day waspasta, If you had pasta, if you have. It was terrible but thank god I had my mother and she helped me a lot.

Emma Libohova

What did she do for you?

C

She did everything. Her sister in Spain, In Madrid, helped her. She brought her money, and the dollar at this time was very good. And she helped me too. She bought for me, food for my kids. She bought meat, she bought macaroni, she bought soap, she bought because over there didn't have anything. Nothing.

Emma Libohova

Was she able to come visit you?

C

No. I went over there with my bicycle. It took one hour to get there. I took what she bought for me in a bag and I came back home. I was very lucky. She helped me a lot. She helped me a lot.

Emma Libohova

How were you able to leave?

C

I was free.

Emma Libohova

Could your kids leave or no?

C

and my kids too. Only my husband. my husband and his brother couldn't. When when got married, my husbands family where all not allowed to move from there. Not his mother, not his brother, not him. And the other families had the same condition like him. Not to move from there, and in the morning and in the night to go do a roll call. You were supposed to go every day, every morning. If it was winter if it was not winter at 6:00. My husband his mom and his brother had to go do roll call. In the morning and the night, And one time I had the occasion where my daughter was sick my husband needed to go to ask, the police, the Sigurimi, to come to see his daughter, in Lushnjë, in the hospital. They didn't let him to come to see. My daughter was three or four years old. And she was sick. I went to the hospital in my city in, Lushnjë. And he couldn't come to see what happened to his daughter. He couldn't come. I went to the police over there. And I asked them to leave him to come to see. And they said no. And when he had some problem with his teeth or something he couldn't go to the dentist. It was terrible.

Emma Libohova

What kind of work did you have to do?

C

Agriculture.

Emma Libohova

In the field.

C

In the field, yes. I do canal, like the man. I dug the canal with the shovel. I worked so hard.

Emma Libohova

Did you work with a lot of women?

C

Yes, yes. Lot of woman like me working.

Emma Libohova

How many hours did you work?

C

8. 10. Sometimes 12.

Emma Libohova

And did you have your kids with you? Where were they when you were working?

C

My oldest daughter came all the time to help me. When she would come from school, she went home, she ate one piece of bread. And she came one hour to come where I worked, to come in help me to make more money.

Emma Libohova

So what about when they were younger though?

Forgotten Structures of Oppression: The Architecture and Legacy of Internment Camps in Communist Albania (1944-1991)

C

There grandmother was with them. My husbands mom.

Emma Libohova

So how did you travel to work each day?

C

Sometime I walked one hour to go to work. Sometime the cars came to pick us up and to go to work far, so far.

Emma Libohova

In different fields?

C

Yes, in different. To work in different place was very far and when we came back home it was night and the kids were waiting over there to eat and to do something. It was very late.

Emma Libohova

Do you remember how much you got paid?

C

I couldn't buy bread with this.

Emma Libohova

So you didn't get paid much?

C

No, no, no, no, nothing. And it was terrible in winter time? In the summertime, I worked so hard and my daughter came to help me and I did Something you know? Just to eat, just to eat. Nothing else. I had one dress for 10 years, one dress. You couldn't do dress like now were you go and buy.

Emma Libohova

How was life like in the camp? Did you have friends that you went to go see?

C

You know what, when I was in the camp, I had friends. I had joy time. And sometime my sister-in-law, my brother's wife, she said 'Oh my God. I see the people who live and laughing', sure, people laughing. And I was there singing, dancing in a wedding, it was somebodies wedding, dancing all night, you know. People living. In every condition you have people live, survive. For us, it was different, and very difficult for us it was terrible. The family, my husbands family was very attacked by the government. But I can't work in the summertime, for example, in the summertime, they had jobs for woman. Easy jobs and to make money. For me they never let me to go to these jobs. Never. Every time they put me to work in a hard job, but they call me one day and they said to me to spy. To spy on people over there. And I said if you call me again for this, I'm going in front of the train. I'll take my three kids, and I'll go kill myself. And they didn't call me anymore. My father, you need to know, was a communist. Yes, and his father (her husbands) was against my father. They battled eachother. My father and his father together. His father was an anti-communist. My father was a communist and they called me thinking, I'm the daughter of the communist, and my father was in prison for 10 years and they called me thinking I'm the daughter of the communist and I'm going to spy on these people where I live now, you know, And I said if you call me again. I'll go in front of the train, take my kids, and you are responsible for this. Don't call me for these things. I remember he said 'You know who you are?' He said to me, 'you are the daughter of Hulusi.' Hulusi was my father. 'You are the daughter of hulusi. He was a communist' and I said to him, 'yes, because I'm the daughter of hulusi! can't do what you want me to do.' And for this reason, they never let me go to the easy jobs. They put me where there were the hard job? And when I go to the doctor or when they saw me go with my bicycle in the city, they would come in in front of me and say to come back that I couldn't go there. And for this reason is why I don't spy on people.

Emma Libohova

Was it different for men and women in the camp?

C

I think nothing was different. For work, nothing. A woman did the same work as a man. I had a more hard job, because it was a big canal, you know, but the woman can do it. But the women worked so hard.

Emma Libohova

Could women get put in prison for some of the same reasons as men, like, for example, how your husband got put in foragitation and propaganda, could a woman be arrested for that?

C

Sure. When they came to arrest my husband, they came in my home to check if I had something suspicious. And they came to do control. You know, the police, and the government, 4-5 people came in there and the police came with automatics. Yes. And

they said to me, don't move, and they come in and they searched and controlled everything. And I asked why are you arresting my husband. And they said because he had Agitation and propaganda. I said no. It's not true. He didn't do anything. He just worked, and work so hard, you know? And I talked to him (officer), and he said to me, you know what? Stop talking and stopsaying things like this, because there are also prisons for woman? And there were prisons for woman, and one very close to us. I don't know the name. And I said, Oh my God, they are going to arrest me, and I stopped talking, and I didn't say anything anymore. They arrest you and they don't care. Nobody asks them why are you arresting him or why are you doing this? Nobody. They do what they want to do with people.

Emma Libohova

How did you make it more livable in the house, did you decorate or anything? Were you allowed to?

C

My house was slow, slow. My kids grew up working, I worked, my husband was in prison after he came back. And slow slow buy some things, you know, for the house. The house was very, very clean. Very clean. And for me it was beautiful. For me, it was my house. When I went to my Mom and I came back, I would say, Oh my God, this is my house. It's Barracks. But it was my house. It was my house.

Emma Libohova

Do you know what these buildings were used for before you were put in the camp? Because I know your husband was saying that in Tepelena, the buildings were army barracks before.

C

Yes, these barracks were built only for the camp. For the camp. I have a picture from when I got married. You can see the barracks you see everything, I don't know where the picture to show you.

Emma Libohova

Was it really hard to get around the camp, and hard to live there?

C

It was hard to live there. But the kids always found someplace to play, you know, all the time outside. And their grandmother took care of them all the time. Went behind them because she was scared they would go in the canal. She was always behind the kids and there cousins. She never went to bed to sleep or to relax. She took care of them.

Emma Libohova

How did it make you feel just being in the barracks?

C

I felt like I was in, you know, how Jewish people were in camps. I felt like this. I slept in one room, and in the other room slept the other people, and I heard them when they were talking and when they were breathing. This was the barracks. We just had one wall. But I could hear everything. And they heard me for everything.

Emma Libohova

Do you think that these buildings should be kept as a memorial or destroyed?

C

I think they've been damaged, I'm pretty sure. It's better to leave this for people to see what was. But, I don't know.

Emma Libohova

No, not if they have, but do you think they should be kept?

C

Yes. People need to know what the communism is. You know, communism is beautiful to read. My father was like this. 'It's beautiful.' He's a communist. It's beautiful to have everything, for everybody to have the same, you know you can't do this. This is a utopia. This is not true.

You see the people who have a position and the goal of that to go up, and everybody starts to steal to change. People change. And they don't think for the poor people, they think only for themselves. Communism in Albania was very bad. They killed people, put people in prison, didn't leave them to talk, and if you said one dream, you were sleeping, for example, and tomorrow you say to your friend, 'Oh my God. You know what I dreamed. I dreamed that I went to America.' If your friend went to the police, they would come and pick you up, and put you in prison for 10 years just for a dream. Not only for a dream. People went to prison just for dancing the twist. They danced and twist, rock'n'roll or something, moving at one wedding. They would come pick them up and put them in prison. There was this one singer, He was dancing when he was singing on the stage, and they put him in prison. They put him in prison for this. Even if you put some short dress or something, an open dress. It was terrible in Albania. It was terrible. They didn't let you think. They didn't let you go to church. For everything. All of Albania was in prison. Not only us. All of albania.

Emma Libohova

Have you ever been back to the camps after your release?

C

Yes, I went two times. And where I used to live, I saw people living. I saw people living who are from there, I don't know. And they were living where I lived for 20 years. And I said, 'Oh my god, how can people live like this?' Yes, people living. Still living there, still living there. Not. Not going in prison. Not anymore. You know this politics. But people living there. It's was a long time. It was 30 years, I didn't think that Barracks were still there.

Emma Libohova

Did living in the camps affect you mentally or physically?

C

A lot. I have all this pain in my body, which was from the camp, from the hard work I did. My back, my legs. When I wake up in the morning I feel so bad.

Emma Libohova

It still affects you today?

C

Yes, I worked hard over there. When my husband was in prison, I did hard work to make money and to live with my kids. And my mother helped me. If my mother didn't help me I would have died over there.

Emma Libohova

What was it like to return to normal life after you left the camp?

C

It was very hard. When I see police, even today I feel scared. I'm free now. I'm very good, I have everything. But when I'm thinking about my life, about when I was a teenager when I was young, and I feel so bad. Why did life go like this? Who has the right to take your life like this? And my husband was a very intelligent boy. He could have done anything he wanted if they let him do it.

Emma Libohova

Have you tried to seek justice or support from the government?

C

No, I came to america and I want for these people now to have justice, but they don't have it. I feel sorry for these people because I see people leaving from Albania. A lot of people leaving. OK, I left my country because I was a political asylum but I never wanted to leave my country. Never. Why would I want to leave my country? I left my county because if I didn't I couldn't do anything. But, now people are leaving for the economy, this is not good because Albania is a beautiful country. It's beautiful country. They can do something for these people.

Emma Libohova

Do you think Albania has done enough to recognize what happened in these camps?

C

No, these people over there think only to steal and nothing else. The people in the government are thieves.

Emma Libohova

Is there any lesson you want other people to learn from your experience?

C

Don't think of communism. This is my experience. Communism is acrazy things, terrible thing. Everything is good only communism is bad.

Emma Libohova

Is there anything else you wanna add before we stop?

C

My last words. I feel sorry for my life. What? They grabbed me like this, my life. And. What to save the people to say don't forget. Don't forget.

Emma Libohova

That's what he said.

C

What? This is important, yeah.

Emma Libohova

It is important.

C

Oh, yeah. Yes, I will see. None is that. No, speaking on that.

Emma Libohova

Alright. Is that all you wanna say?

C

I want to say I'm so happy that I have 11 grandkids. And I'm a lucky woman, but fast is fast. Now I'm free. And enjoyed my life.

APPENDIX D

Interview with Participant D (Age 49) on the 3rd of January 2025 for 1 hour.

Albanian man who was born in Gradishte camp and interned in an Internment camp in Communist-era Albania.

Emma Libohova

What was your earliest memory of living in the camp?

D

Earliest memory. Well, let me see. I remember. I remember being in kindergarten or whatever. They kept us when my parents were, you know, my dad was in prison. And my mom, she was working the fields, right, you know. Cotton, or whatever it was that she was working on, digging huge, these ditches they used to dig all the time. And then she would bring me to this kindergarten, I guess it was a kindergarten. But they just, you know. I remember in the balcony when it was time for her to come pick me up. I'll always look outside the window looking for her. You know, 'cause, it was like the most exciting part of the day when she would pick me up. I was very young at the time. I think maybe seven or eight, maybe even younger. I'm not sure. I guess the earliest earliest, though not to do with where I lived, is just being me and my dad, right. I remember him having this old army coat and him holding me like, you know, like you would hold a baby. You know, I must have been maybe 5 because he got arrested when I was 5 1/2. I think at the time. So he got taken away at that time, so it must have been around 5 1/2, you know. So I remember that. I remember that memory. I don't know why, but that one. I don't remember much else as far as when I was a child. You know, five or six or seven years old, but that one I remember.

Emma Libohova

Do you remember the house you lived in, or barrack?

D

Oh yeah. Oh yeah, absolutely. I remember everything about it. It was made of basically mud and hay, you know, that's what, that's how they used to build them back then. It was like I imagine these barracks, right. Long barracks and they would go, let's say north to South or South to north and then each family would have a door that would go into the barracks, and the barracks were basically, you know, walled for each family. So a barrack that was maybe 300 feet, 400 feet long, maybe. I don't even know if it was that big really, it's shorter than that probably. But it would have maybe, I'm trying to think, us, my uncle lived next door, next to them there was this other person, another one, it was maybe four or five families that lived in one side of the barrack. And then on the other side of the barrack, you'd have another four or five families. So that's how they were built, like kind of like an Army base. So you'd have these barracks lined up. There were three or four. I'm not 100% sure it was 4, but definitely 3. And they were lined up, and each one there would be a little street, you know, in the middle of the two barracks and then houses. Basically families living in each one, and then in front of it that people had like wooden fences and whatnot, you know, to make it their own, right? So yeah, I remember everything about it. We didn't have, so initially what we had, we had this little kitchen area that was right outside the barrack that had been built with bricks made out of mud and hay that my dad had built with his brother. So they'll take the mud, and they'll put the hay inside it, and they would leave it out to dry in the sun. And then it would dry out and become hard like a brick. And they'll start building it, right. So he built that kitchen. Again, it was just a room. We called it a kitchen because that's where we ate. That's where we spend most of our time. That's where the furnace, the heat source, was. That was the only heat source in the house. It was a little furnace that we used to, you know, put wood in. But the rooms and everything else which were across, you know, separated from the kitchen, they did not have heat. So in the wintertime obviously it was very cold. So you'd have to wear a lot of clothes and a lot of blankets, you know, to be warmed up. But yeah, I remember that very well. I remember that little kitchen. And then later on, when my dad came out from prison, you know, he built a... So we would have an outhouse in the back where all the people would share the outhouses. That was the restroom, basically. And they tried to keep it as clean as they could, but obviously, you'd have people that did not live in that section who would come in and use them, and obviously they didn't care, and it was always dirty. It was just this hole in the ground, right, and so most families would have a shared toilet, you know, like outhouse. So we had one shared with two other families, I think. So my dad, when he came, that's the first thing that he did. He built a bathroom. He built us a bathroom where we had our own bathroom, where we could take showers and use the restroom, which was the biggest, best thing ever.

Emma Libohova

Did you have an actual shower, or was it just water from the well?

D

No, no, no, shower. We would take a bucket, you know, fill it up with water, and then we'd heat it up. And in the furnace, the stove, we would heat that up, and then we'd use

that. We would heat it a lot, actually, if I remember correctly, because then we could use cold water to supplement it to make it warm enough, you know, for multiple people to take a shower, to take a bath, or whatever they needed to take. So yeah, initially, when I was a kid, I remember. When I was a kid, they used to give me a shower in the middle of the kitchen, and the neighbors used to come in. And so that was very entertaining. You know, as a little kid, you know, 6-7 years old, taking a bath in front of neighbors. So yeah, there was no privacy, but that was initially, and then when my dad built the bathroom, obviously again, same thing, same system. It's just that we had privacy, at least. You know, everybody would use their own time in the shower or in the bathroom.

Emma Libohova

What was the school like?

D

School, school as a kid. See, that's the thing. As a kid, school was school. School was like an escape. It was good because we liked school. School was a place where we kind of felt, you know. In a way, I felt superior because when the people that lived in a concentration camp, that internment camp, we were very, our parents made us read books. You know, they made us read books. I remember reading *The Iliad*, you know, when I was 12. So, you know, reading *Crime and Punishment* and Dostoevsky, or Tolstoy or whatever, at a very young age. So what we would do is we would exchange books with our neighbors. So our neighbors had books. Everybody would exchange them, so we had it, even though personally, we did not have a big library, we had some books, but as a community, as an internment camp like that, everybody sharing their own books became, you know, like we had a huge library of books. You could read a lot of different things. So the kids that came out of the camp, we were actually, I don't want to say smarter because we weren't smarter, but we were better educated because when we went to school, we would be the best students in the school, and there was some animosity towards us because of that. They didn't like the fact that these kids who were on purpose, you know, in this internment camp, you know, being punished, and yet they were succeeding, you know, so that was not good. The teachers tried their hardest, the bad ones, 'cause there were always good ones. There were always the ones that cared, you know, even though they didn't show it. But the bad ones, they made sure that you knew. We kept our heads down or, you know, if we had an answer for a question or things like that, they never called on us because they didn't want to. I remember in, it's not high school, it may have been my first year of high school, maybe, I was 14 or 15. In the summertime, they would make us go and work in the fields. So, when school would end in June, they would make us go and work for two to four weeks of basically free labor in the fields, like collecting cotton, digging ditches, you name it. And it was unpaid, right? And so all the kids would go and do this thing, and collecting cotton was the hardest one because it was summertime. It was hot. And the cotton, when you picked it, it's prickly. So like when you pick it, it kind of, you wouldn't have gloves or anything like that. Protection, right? So it would always, you know, stab into our fingers and all that stuff, and I remember that year I was with my friends, and this was towards when communism was kind of deteriorating, and we kind of knew that the end was near. But I remember we went to this place to work, and me and my three friends, it was three boys and a girl, we said, "You know what, we're not going to do this. This is not fair. This is not right. We're not gonna do it." So they're like, "OK," the teacher said. "You're not gonna do it, then you don't get water," right? So I remember it was 95°, whatever it was, 100° in the summer heat. They didn't give us water to drink, so we went and drank water from a ditch. We actually did. There were frogs there and stuff like that. We cleaned it up and we grabbed some water. We cleaned from the ditch, and we drank it. So when they saw that, they were angry because they wanted to punish us, but we kind of circumvented the punishment by drinking water from the ditch. So of course, what does he do? He lines us up in front of the whole school and punishes us by slapping us, by hitting us. You know, so he hit. He hit us very hard. I remember he hit the first person, second person, third person. When he came to me, I kind of moved, and I kind of put my hand up to block him. And I got really angry. And I was like almost staring him down. But I was always bigger than him. So imagine I was 15, 14 1/2, but I was a big kid. You know, I'm 6'3 now. I think I must have been maybe 6'1 then. And I stared him down. And he wanted to hit me again. But when he saw me that I was just staring him down, like almost like, "Go ahead, hit me, I'll hit you back," he went to the next person. And I remember he hit one of the girls, and he hit the girl, and she obviously was upset. She cried. She cried. And the next day, I remember she told her brother. She had two older brothers, big boys. Yeah, they came to school, and they just told that teacher to never put a hand on anyone ever again. You know, because the brothers came and took care of business. But yeah, I remember the school was, you know, I kind of went off on a tangent there for a little bit, but the school was fine. We did good in school. We, as a group, always hung out together. So like, if you picked on one of us, you picked on all of us, you know? There were maybe 20-25 of us. And if you ever picked on one of us, it didn't matter who it was, right? You would have to deal with 25 of us. That's how it was. It's like they knew that they said,

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"Hey, you do not touch the people from Gradishte," right? Gradishte was the name of the internment camp. "You just don't mess with them." They knew that. So, like, they knew that. Their older siblings knew that because of my siblings and other siblings who went to school. So it was almost passed on through generations: Do not mess with those people. They will stick up for each other. They will hurt you. So, kind of in a way, the only people that bothered us were the teachers. Other than the teachers, I remember one time they took me in front of the school. And basically, with a bunch of other kids, the teacher was pointing his finger at us and saying, "These are the imperialists, these are the capitalists, these are the enemy of all the other kids." Imagine you're a 12-year-old kid, 13-year-old kid, and you're like, "What enemy? Of what? I'm an imperial what?" We didn't know what those words meant. We were just kids playing soccer. And I mean, a lot of these kids who were supposedly our enemy, or we were their enemy, they were my friends. So, you know, here they are pointing the finger at us in front of everyone, how we are the bad guys. We are the enemy, you know? So yeah. That was school.

Emma Libohova

So the school wasn't in the camp? It was somewhere else since you were with other students from different places?

D

Yeah. So initially, elementary school, I think it was two grades or three grades, we were in the camp. But don't forget, the camp didn't just have people like us, right? Well, the internment, the people who were there as prisoners. There were also families of the officers or people who were there to watch us, right? So it was a community of people, it wasn't just us. And the funny thing is, we got to know them as well. They got to know us through the years, 30-40 years, and we became friends with a lot of those people. You know, it wasn't animosity. There wasn't... Yeah, sure, there were some bad people, but for the most part, people were good people, tried to help each other. It was in the middle of nowhere and, like I said, for the most part, people were okay, even though we were in prison. But yeah, school was there for two or three grades, and after that, we had to walk away. We had to go to school about an hour away for both high school and middle school. Middle school, I remember we had to walk. We would basically wake up in the morning, you know, do our thing, brush our teeth, blah blah. And then we would take our shoes and we took them off. We would never go to school with shoes on because it was so muddy. The mud was like snow, right? It was up to almost your ankles, to your knees. It was really high. So we tried to take our shoes and put them in the bag and then walk to school barefoot. You know, imagine in the winter, rain, whatever it was, mud. And then when we got there, we'd have to wash our feet and then put our shoes on to go back to class. Having to go through a huge, it was like this canal that used to always flood. And there was this pipe on top of it. And that's how the kids used to go to class. There was no bridge. You'd have to literally get on top of that pipe. The pipe was maybe about a foot and a half thick, and then you'd have to basically just balance yourself and then get to the other side while the canal, the river, whatever it was, was gushing underneath because of the flooding and all that stuff. So that was scary. It was terrifying, especially as a kid. I remember, you had to get on your knees and hands trying to cross that thing because it was just like, you'd see the water just kind of gushing underneath you, and then high school for two years, a year and a half that I went. Same thing, but we'd have to basically walk for about an hour every day in the morning and then afternoon come back home.

Emma Libohova

Did you have to leave school at any point like your sister?

D

No. She had left school in 8th grade, I think.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

D

I did not. I actually went on to... because my sister got married, and she took me to Shkodër for one year, right? She took me in my first year of high school. I actually did it in Shkodër and then when I came back, I came back for my second year, and I did some of it in the place there. And then we left after that. The border opened up, we got our passports, and we left. But yeah, so yeah, I was lucky.

Emma Libohova

How old were you when you left Albania?

D

15, 15 1/2. Yeah, 15 1/2, yeah.

Emma Libohova

And then you did high school here (USA)?

D

Yeah, I did high school here. We left around May. We left in May, I think, from Albania, we went to Italy for four months, came to the United States sometime in, I think actually the right date was August 21, '91, I believe, and we came to New York on August 21. Yeah, in 1991. We stayed with my aunt, who lived in the United States. My dad's half-sister. We stayed with them until we found our own little apartment and I went to high school. I actually started school two weeks later, here in the States. I spoke a little English when I got here. My dad, when he came from prison, I was 12 years old. And so,

in Albania, they would teach us foreign languages, right? So the foreign languages that they taught us were either Russian or English. So those were the two enemies, right? So even though Russia was a communist country, they didn't think Russia was communist enough. Imagine that. So they thought Russia was not communist enough. So you either spoke Russian in school, they taught you Russian or English. So I got lucky and my language was English, but I was not a good student. Well, I was a good student, but I was not an A student. It came easy for me to learn the language, but I was not a good student like a book student, right?

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

D

You know, tests and all that stuff or spending my time trying to learn the language because, I mean, you live in that place. It's not like you're thinking about the future, you know, or you're thinking about the United States or America or anything like that.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

D

So anyway. But yeah, when my dad came from prison, he said, "What language are you learning in school?" So I said, "English." And he said, "OK, good." So he basically got me a book, an English little book thingy, and he made me study every day for like an hour, which I hated because I wanted to play soccer with my friends, and then I remember he would come from work, and he would come all the way in the back behind the homes, the warehouses, you know, and then we would play on the fields with my friends. And then I knew exactly what time he would come home. Like, 5:30-6. He'd be there, and all I have to do is just look up. He would never even call my name. No, none of that. He would just stand there watching, and then as soon as I made eye contact, he would like, raise his hand. And he would wave his little finger, kind of like, come, come here. You know, like with his finger. So I hated that because my friends started doing that to me. They waved their finger. I'm like, here we go. So of course. So I would go in and I would study English for an hour, so when we came to the States. I actually spoke English, and I actually spoke very well to the point where they thought I did not need ESL classes, second language classes. So they wanted me to go to regular classes, which was great because I could assimilate better, right? And it was awesome. You know, my math skills, and the funny thing is, in Albania, one thing that they did well was education. As far as elementary and high school, they gave us a lot of work. That was a lot of work, like we would do algebra, we would do everything, you know, geography, social sciences, everything. When I came here, I was doing, I remember the quadratic formula. We were doing that, and I had done that like two years previously. And so when I went to school here, in math, for example, I was really good. I was a straight-A student. I was doing so well that the teacher actually asked me to be a tutor to help out other kids because they were falling behind. You know, of course, I had refused because I didn't want to be, you know, called out from my friends or whatever. But anyway. But yeah, so when I came here, to answer your question, I was 15, 15 1/2 and went to high school.

Emma Libohova

Do you think it was hard for you to adjust to life after leaving Albania?

D

Absolutely, it was impossible. I, as a kid. So as a kid, you don't suffer the way adults suffer, right? Like, I mean, if you ask me now, obviously I would say absolutely not. I'll never want to go back to that kind of life, but at the time when I left, I remember I cried because I was leaving my friends behind. That's the only thing that I knew. Like we grew up as brothers and sisters with these people, you know, I was raised with them. You know, we shared food, we shared everything. Oh, it was very hard to leave, and coming to the United States, the culture shock was devastating. I remember I was tall and skinny. I was maybe 150 lbs, something like that. But I was tall, right? I was 6'2, 6'3, and I was very thin, you know. And coming to the States, I got so depressed because of the culture shock and just not being with friends and not being able to do the things that I grew up doing, like playing soccer all day long and hanging out with my friends, you know? I didn't do any of that. I hit this huge wall of depression. I remember gaining. I think at the highest, I became like 237 lbs. Yeah, imagine that, right? From 160 to 237 lbs. I became this, I just couldn't move. Like, I did not enjoy anything, I did not do anything, and I didn't have any friends. Obviously, it was impossible to make friends and all that. And not because of the language barrier, but because of the culture. It was just very different for me, you know. I didn't understand. I didn't like it. But high school, senior year of high school, that's when I kind of got out of it a little bit. I started working out, started running, started playing soccer, being more active, and I lost all the weight, and I went back to like 185 lbs. So yeah, it took a year and a half to two years to really kind of adjust. It was very difficult. If you had asked me at that time to go back or stay in the United States, I probably would have, as a kid, I probably would have said, "Go back." Imagine. Go back to that life. But you know, for me as a kid, that was better than what I had here because I was missing the most important thing, which was friends.

Emma Libohova

Do you think your view of living in Albania is different from your sister's and everyone else's?

D

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely, yes. I can't say that I've suffered what they have. Like my

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sisters, they couldn't go to high school. As soon as they finished 8th grade, they started working. It was expected of them to work, working the fields every single day, collecting cotton, digging ditches, you name it. It was terrible. So yeah, for them, life was far more difficult than it was for me. And also, being the only boy in the family, I got a lot of things that they didn't, you know. For example, if there was a stick of butter that we had to save, they would save that stick of butter for me. Nobody would take a bite of that. If there was a cup of milk, that cup of milk would go to me. They would not drink that. You know what I mean? Anything that was there for us to enjoy, it was mine. Like, they would save it for me because I was the youngest. So yeah, they definitely suffered way more than I did. I was lucky enough to leave when I was 15, and even then, I still had gone to high school a little bit and experienced some of that life. As a boy, it's a little different too, but for them, it was way more difficult.

Emma Libohova

How do you think life was different for women compared to men in Albania?

D

Well. Yeah, I don't know if you're asking like, culturally or kind of, like, religiously because there was no religion, right? They didn't let us practice religion. So religiously, you know, there was no difference. I mean, it was hard. I would say it was harder on women because they were expected to work. They were expected to go to the fields and work. It didn't matter if they had a 2-month-old at home or not. It wasn't this culture of, well, my husband works. He makes enough money. Then I can stay home. No, everybody works. You go to work, you know? So yeah. For women, it was a lot harder. And I think they got treated harshly as well. You know, the men, they got their share as well. I'm not saying men did not, but it was different for the men. It was different for the women. And my mom, raising three children on her own for 7 1/2 years, eight years, was extremely difficult, and she was not the only one. Right. I mean, she's just an example of these women. Every single woman in that camp was exactly like my mom. Not every single one, because obviously there was the other side. But you know, from our side, every single woman, their husband got arrested at some point and spent time in jail while the women were left home with just the kids. So yeah, it was absolutely more difficult for the women.

Emma Libohova

What do you remember about the camp itself, like how it looked and everything?

D

I remember everything about it. I remember it was just mud. Mud everywhere or dust in the summer. So imagine mud, like I said, up to your ankle, and I'm not exaggerating. It's like basically half a foot of mud, right? Just mud. That's thick, thick mud. And then that mud would become dust in the summer because it didn't rain much. And it's a very dry climate. And it was warm. Hot but not humid. Not humid like it is here. It was less humid. But for the kids, for me as a kid, I loved it. You know, we had our little field in the back where we played soccer, and that was my existence. We would wake up in the morning and go to the field with my friends, and I'd spend most of my day until 8:00 at night basically just playing soccer and playing. Either that or going to some of the other, there were some water places we would go and swim with the snakes and the frogs. It was dirty water, but we made it work. So yeah, I remember the buildings. I remember where we went to shop, where we went to go buy our food. I remember when the bread and the milk and all that stuff came to the camp once every day. They would bring that in. Sometimes the bread would be stale, so you'd have to eat it no matter what. And yeah, everybody would line up. And then you'd pay for it and go home and try to eat it. I remember a lot of the times the bread had these white maggots, like little worms inside it, and as a child, I couldn't eat it. But my grandmother didn't care. She's like, "Eat it, it's protein. It's good for you. It's meat." You know. But my mom would just sit there, trying to clean it up, try to take all the maggots out, and then try to eat it. You know, I remember that store. I remember the school was next to it, the houses. Yeah, I remember everything about it. Like it was yesterday. I mean, I went back when I was 25, I think when I worked in Italy and Albania with the Department of Defense, and I went back there with the unit that I was working with, the colonel, a couple of CIA guys, and they were astonished that I actually came from that place. They're like, "You lived here?" I was like, "Yeah." It's funny because we went there, we went to the store and this guy, he always hung out at the store. He would just sit there at the store all day long. That was his place. We went back. And he was still there. And I'm like, "Oh my God." Then I went to him and I said, "Do you know who I am?" He looked at me. Because, you know, 10 years had passed at that point. But he looked at me, and he goes, "You're [participant A]'s son." I'm like, "How do you know that?" He's like, "As tall as you are," he said. "There was nobody tall here like him." That's funny, but yeah.

Emma Libohova

Is it the only time you've ever been back?

D

Yeah, that's the only time. It's funny because being back there, it was changed but at the same time, it was the same. It was dirtier than I remember, a lot dirtier than I remember, the home. So I went to my home where I used to live, and somebody else lived there, and these people were poor. I mean, poorer than we were. But the way they were keeping the place, it was dirty, and it just looked terrible. Like, we lived in mud and dust, but we never kept it muddy or dusty, ever. Like, my mom and my sisters would sit there all day cleaning up every single day. Just making it, you know, as homey as possible. They were just clean freaks. These people had just let it go. It was like, I think they had a cow in the kitchen to tell the truth. Yeah, I think they were using the kitchen as a place for the cow. So yeah, it was pretty bad. It's pretty bad.

Emma Libohova

Was there an actual floor or was it like mud when you lived there?

D

No, there was a floor. There was a floor. The floor was just basically cement. Yeah, it was just like they laid the cement, and then that's where the warehouse was on top of. But that was the only place where we had cement or anything like that. Everywhere else was just mud. There were no roads. Remember, we didn't have cars. There were no cars, there were no vehicles. Things like that. There was maybe one vehicle that was owned by the state and by the police, but nothing else. Roads only came later. In Albania, it was a third-world country.

Emma Libohova

Do you remember what the house was made out of?

D

You could hear everything. So the walls, there was no insulation. So the walls were basically this thin, thin sheetrock, right? You call it sheetrock. Whatever you call it. I don't know what it was, but it was thin. Very thin, so you could hear your neighbors farting. I'm not joking. They would fart on the other side, and you'd knock on the wall. Like, "Hey, keep it down," and they would knock back, you know. You'd hear everything. I have this phobia of mice, right? And the only reason I have a phobia of mice and rats is because on top of the ceiling, you'd hear mice running all night. And as a child, my fear was that they would drop on top of me. And so I have this fear now of mice and rats because of that, every single night. Yeah, so that's why I have that fear. But it's funny because as a kid, I didn't care. You know, I was just scared of them dropping on me. But yeah, the walls were thin, and the floors were just basic cement, and everything else was mud. There was no proper insulation, and everything was very basic.

Emma Libohova

Do you have any other memories of living there?

D

Yeah. I mean, you know, I have good memories. I have memories of, like I said, spending the days in the kitchen with the stove on trying to heat up, playing games with my sister and mom. We would, you know, create our own games with like cards. Cards, you know, you cut them, you put the Jack, the King, the Queen, right? You write them on the cards yourself. There was this other game, I forgot the name of it, but we would play bingo. Like we would make our own bingo, little balls. We called it the tombola. That's the name in Albanian, *tombola*, but it's actually bingo. It's the same game. You'd have a card with a bunch of numbers on it, and then you'd shuffle the little numbers, and then whoever won, won, right? But yeah, that was what we did, or spent time reading. You know, TV was non-existent for many years because we didn't have one. And then when we did buy one, it was a black and white TV. And the only thing that they would show on TV was basically like "educational", well, I want to put that in quotes because it was not educational programs. It was basically communist programming, right? They were trying to program you, so we would not watch TV much. You know, so that was the only channel we could watch except in the summertime. In the summertime, we put up some antennas and then we actually could pick up Italian TV. So we watched Italian TV in the summertime, and that's how I know, that's how everybody learned how to speak Italian. So when I was a kid, I actually spoke Italian very well.

Emma Libohova

So they mostly only showed propaganda on Albanian TV?

D

Yeah. Propaganda. All the time. How amazing we are and how the rest of the world is dying, and how America is a cesspool of crime and homelessness, and it's on the brink of war, and you know, the population is dying and this and that. It was just like, you know, propaganda all the time, you know, telling us how amazing we had it. It's like, if you ever have a chance, you can go and actually on YouTube and watch North Korean propaganda TV. It's exactly the same. Like, it's exactly the same. If you watch the North Korean propaganda TV, it's mind-boggling how it's exactly the same. It's like they copied it from the same book. I mean, for North Korea, Russia was not communist enough. It never was. So Albania was exactly the same way.

Emma Libohova

Do you still talk to people from the camp?

D

Well, I mean, yeah, we are in touch. We do talk, but not to the extent. Unfortunately, kind of, you know. I was a kid, I was 15. My sister still does. She's more into the whole community thing than I am. Me, on the other hand, I mean, I do talk to them, but I do talk to them when I see them at special events, you know, like a wedding or unfortunately, you know, somebody dying or something like that. But other than that, no, not really. We live in different places, and there's so many people living in Italy, some in Greece, some here in the United States, all over the country, Germany, you name it. So we kind of spread everywhere. Everybody's got their own family. Now it's, you know, we're 35–40 years removed from that. So it's a long time ago.

Emma Libohova

Do you know if anyone from the camp stayed in Albania?

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D

Not really. I don't know of anyone that really stayed in Albania. If they stayed, they stayed because there was no other option, not because they wanted to, you know. Like, we were lucky enough to have relatives out here in the United States that helped us when we came here. Especially because you come from nothing, and then you have nothing, you need support. You need someone to help you out, and we had that, you know. But other people did not have that. Not so lucky. So yeah, I'm sure a couple of them probably stayed behind. Yeah, so I'm sure a couple of people probably stayed behind, but it wasn't out of choice. It was because they had no other options.

Emma Libohova

Do you remember if you had any contact with family outside of the camp when you were still living there?

D

Outside of the camp, the only contact I had with family, or at least relatives, was my mom's relatives. They were in the city next to where we lived. It was about an hour away, walking distance, maybe a little bit more. As a kid, it's kind of fuzzy, but I think it was a little longer than that. So there was no other way to get there. You'd have to walk, and I would walk there with my mom. Once in a while, we would go there and see my grandmother and my uncle. Those were the only ones that I really had contact with. My dad's side, they lived up north, and it was impossible for us to get there. Even when we did get there, it was, you know, it was very hard. It was very, very hard.

Emma Libohova

Do you remember what it was like if you ever got sick in the camp?

D

That's the thing. I mean, so I got burned once, I got burned really badly because we were playing with my cousins, and I jumped off a fence and on the other side, there was this water that my grandmother was boiling. She was boiling some water to clean some sheets or something. And I literally landed on top of the boiling water and I burned my leg, my upper leg, really badly. But we didn't have a doctor, right? So the older people in the camp, they said do this, do that. So my grandmother got it from, I guess, some older person who told her to take the acid from the paint, like wall paint, and put that on the burn. And she thought she said take the paint and put it on my burn. So imagine they were putting paint, which is acid, right on my leg, and it got so infected that it became all pus, on the whole side of my leg, and I couldn't walk. And I remember that they had to bring me to the hospital in the city where my uncle and my grandmother lived. They brought me in there with special permission. You know, the doctor came and saw me, and he's like, "Oh my God, this looks really bad." He told my mom, because my dad wasn't there, he was in prison, they told my mom, "We're going to try, but this is really infected. Like, really badly, you know. We will see what we can do, but this leg is really bad."

So they came in, they held me down, and they cleaned my wound. I passed out because they didn't have any sedatives or anything like that, so I had to basically endure the pain. And I remember passing out a couple of times, then waking up, and my leg was wrapped. And, I made it basically. They saved my leg, but the doctor said a few more days of that and they would have had to amputate the leg because it was really bad. It was infected beyond. So basically, what they told my grandmother is you take the paint or whatever, but when it's separated at the top, that one kind of keeps the germs away in a way, you know, to keep you safe. So, OK. So, in a way, that makes sense, but not the full paint, which she put on my leg. So imagine they would do that every night, and I'm like, "I'm dying. Stop. You hate me." And they were like, "Oh, stop being like that. I know it hurts, but it's good for you." And then when they saw that my leg was getting worse, they were like, "Oh, wait a minute, this is bad."

Emma Libohova

They painted on your leg every night?

D

Every night. Every night. They would paint my leg. Literally, they would paint my leg. And this wasn't paint like paint that you have here. This was thick, acidic paint. It was just disgusting. I don't know how my leg made it, but to answer your question as far as being sick, well, we were never really sick. Like, that's the thing about living in a place like that. Our immune systems were very strong. I didn't know what allergies were, or any of us. We didn't know what allergies were until we came to this country. You know, nobody had a food allergy over there or a grass allergy. Pollen, things like that. Or seed or anything like that, we never did. It was only in the United States, when we came here, that we realized people were talking about allergies, this and that. And I still don't. I still don't have any allergies. We grew up healthy. Well, I mean, maybe because living in those conditions, you forcefully have to survive. You have to make it. Yeah, I remember that there was a doctor who would come in once a month, and maybe distribute shots, penicillin, or anything like that needed. But it was only once a month. So yeah, the doctor would come once a month, and it wasn't like they treated much, but it was what it was. We made it through, but it wasn't ideal.

Emma Libohova

Have you tried to seek justice or support from the government at all since then?

D

Me personally, no, absolutely not. I was 15 years old. My dad has. I mean, my dad is deeply rooted in Albanian politics, even today. But I'm not. You know, I mean, some

people have tried, but those responsible they don't take the blame for anything they've done. I mean, I don't blame them. They've got families and kids themselves. My dad is not the type, and I'm not the type, to point the finger and do that. The way the system worked was you either cooperate, or you end up just like the rest of us. You know, so some of those people, they didn't want to do the things they did, you know. But they had to because they had families. Simple. There's nothing else. You know, they could have been a lot worse with us, and they were not because a lot of those people cared for us. You know, they grew up in the same place as us. Their kids went to school with us. They were friends with us, so it's almost like a vicious cycle that never stops. If we try to hold them accountable, they're gonna try to hold us accountable for something, and the cycle just never ends, you know. So it doesn't go anywhere.

Emma Libohova

Do you think Albania has done enough to recognize what happened in these camps?

D

No. No, I don't think they have, and I don't think they ever will. Like I said, there's so much injustice that has happened in that country through the years that it's impossible for them to do that. You know, a lot of the wealth that's been generated by some of these people today who are millionaires, billionaires, they got that wealth because of the position they were in, right. So calling out that, you know, that wrongdoing, it's almost like calling out themselves. So no, they're not gonna do that ever.

Emma Libohova

Do you think these camps should be destroyed or memorialized?

D

Definitely not destroyed. Definitely not destroyed. People cannot forget because this stuff is happening today everywhere in the world. There are other places in the world that it is happening. So my story is just, you know, one of millions, probably. So destroying this, it's a way to erase history. We should definitely try to keep these camps alive. I mean, look at Auschwitz, right? It's still there. People need to be reminded.

Emma Libohova

Is there anything else you would want others to know about these camps?

D

I don't know. I mean, it's hard. Sometimes I go through memories that just spark, that just come to me, and I keep thinking about moments, things like that happened that are sometimes sad, sometimes happy, depending, you know. But, I don't know. The camps, they were what they were, right? And they made me who I am in a way. I think I'm stronger because of the camps or the life that I had there. I think I've experienced what maybe only 1% of the population of the world has experienced as far as where we lived and how we were treated and that life, being in an internment camp.

Emma Libohova

Is there a lesson you hope people learn from your experience?

D

The only lesson, I mean, just hopefully it never gets repeated, but unfortunately, it does every single day.

Emma Libohova

Yeah.

D

That's the only lesson. Just don't repeat it, but it doesn't seem like we're learning from our experiences. Look at history. Every time I go back in history, there's always this. The formula is the same. The actors are different. You know, the elements are different, but it's always the same formula. People do the same things over and over and over and over again, and they expect different results, and they always do it with the, "Oh, but it's different for us. We're doing it for this reason." Not really. You know, it's always the same. Somebody's suffering.

Emma Libohova

Is there anything else you want to add?

D

No, I mean, I think your questions were on point. You know, like I said, from my perspective, it's completely different than anyone else's because I was 15. I was raised in an internment camp. I grew up there. I was 15 when I left, so yeah, my perception and everything else is different than, you know, the rest of my family because they lived it more than I did. Like I said, I was the baby of the family, and I was always spoiled with the crumbs. The crumbs were there for me. They sacrificed a lot for me, and I appreciate that because without my sisters, I would have been a different person. So they were like my mothers. They raised me. They raised me. So those are the things that I miss.