

# Review of: "Collective Guilt and the Search for Meaning in Post-Communist Albania: An Existential Perspective"

Barry Richards<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bournemouth University

**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

This article is on a very important topic and I looked forward to reading it, to gain some understanding of Albania today but also of other post-communist nations. The emotional legacy of communism must be an important factor in the present-day politics of all the countries concerned, and although Albania is a special case in some ways it seemed likely that this study would have some wider relevance. My major interest is in the emotional dimensions of politics, broadly speaking, which calls for a psychosocial approach, and this article's abstract promised such an approach.

Unfortunately I found it disappointing. It reads more like an extended summary of the article it could be, not a complete draft. As it is, it has several major gaps.

1. It lacks discussion of any literature on the psychology of post-communist transitions. I have not studied this field but would be surprised if there were no publications directly relevant to this topic. Volkan is referred to, and some of his work is very relevant, but his ideas need a closer application to the Albanian situation, rather than just passing reference.
2. The method is only briefly described. There is no account of how participants were 'self-selected', and crucially no information about them demographically other than their age group. So it is impossible to assess what section(s) of Albanian society they may represent. There is only one sentence on what they were asked to do, and no explanation of why this was stretched across two weeks.
3. The process of analysis and its specific outcomes are not described. A brief general description of thematic analysis does not tell us what themes were actually generated. The discussion is structured simply in terms of the two broad categories which framed the inquiry at the outset: collective guilt, and meaning making. Nothing has been added as a result of the research, except the assertion that the participants were doing the two things which they were asked to report on, and – as might have been expected – guilt was a problematic element which could either underpin or obstruct constructive engagement with the past. The report of a study like this should have much more detail to offer on the specific content of both the guilt and the meaning-making.
4. Linked to 3., there are no quotes from the narratives, which are necessary to bring the findings to life. The reader can get no feel for the experiences which the participants were presumably describing in their narratives. This is one reason why the article feels just like a summary of the research rather than a report of it.
5. It is good to read that some older Albanians are thoughtful and reflective about their roles in the communist era, and are trying to think constructively about the present and future of the country – though again, exactly how they are doing

this remains unknown. Also, the lack of information described in 2. above means we cannot tell anything about wider Albanian society from this data. In the UK at present we read news of Albanian villages losing many of their young men who are seeking to emigrate, so to know more about others in the country who apparently have some hope for its future would be welcome.

6. The impression is given that all the participants felt more or less the same things. Again, the lack of any specific data or information about the products of the coding process prevents us from seeing anything of the differences (in emphasis and preoccupation, if not in more basic world-view) which you would expect to find across a sample of twenty people.

The article is quite short, and could even be shorter as it repeats a lot of abstract statements about its themes. So there is substantial room for much more detail of the kind currently missing, which is necessary to fill the gaps. With all the above gaps filled, this could be a very interesting and valuable research report. Since the data has been collected and the analysis conducted, it should be possible to fill the gaps, but the result would be a very different article from the present one, which I think is a long way from where it needs to be. I hope the authors will decide to rework it, and to continue research on this topic.