

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

Ion Marandici¹

¹ Rutgers University

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The article approaches the topic of existential collective guilt by studying personal narratives about the Communist past. This is an important topic and deserves more attention. It is raised in many post-totalitarian and post-authoritarian contexts. I should note that I have used thematic analysis in a paper and have written another paper about nostalgia for the Communist past and voting.

The paper has a strong core. I only have three points to make:

1. With regards to RQ 1: I would have preferred a more open-ended research question such as "How do you make sense of Albania's Communist past? What sentiments/emotions do you associate with the Communist past?" This, in turn, would have produced 20 narratives that could have been classified under different themes such as guilt, nostalgia, rejection etc. In other words, it is quite possible that some Albanians express nostalgia toward the Communist past rather than guilt. There have been various public opinion surveys showing a certain degree of Communist nostalgia in Albania. It may be that Albanians perceive the Communist past in different ways. One could, thus, draw a contrast between guilt and nostalgia.
2. Regarding methodology. The authors follow the methodology outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in a rather unusual way in the sense that they set out to study collective guilt assuming right from the start that the respondents would express such guilt toward the past. Did you select only individuals who expressed such guilt? Or was the selection random? Did all participants express guilt or only some?
3. Finally, it is worth asking how closely associated were the respondents with the Communist regime. If at the time of the interview, respondents are 60, it means that in the 1990s they were in their late 20s. So, we may assume that they were not closely integrated in the Communist regime. If one was just a simple citizen, not a party member, it is not clear why one would feel guilty. It is worth inserting a paragraph explaining whether their perception of the Communist past was shaped by ulterior events.

Even though it is a bit too normative, the paper is certainly an interesting and innovative way of studying individual and collective orientations toward the Communist past.

Here are some papers that I have written using thematic analysis as well as papers about perceptions of the Communist past & the Romanian revolution that the authors may (or may not) find helpful:

Ion Marandici, A Second Cold War? Explaining Changes in the American Discourse on China: Evidence from the Presidential Debates (1960–2020). *Journal of Chinese Political Science*(2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-023-09857-z>

Ion Marandici (2022) Nostalgic Voting? Explaining the Electoral Support for the Political Left in Post-Soviet Moldova, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 63:4, 514-542, DOI: [10.1080/15387216.2021.1918565](https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2021.1918565) (accepted version here: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4426696)

Ion Marandici, "Collective Action, Memories of 1989, and Social Media," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, October 2022, pp. 1-23, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/cpcs.2022.1716515>