

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

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Addressing a dictatorship's past through notions of collective guilt and meaning making practices and how these two interact seems to be the novelty of the article 'Collective Guilt and the Search for Meaning in Post-communist Albania: An Existential Perspective'. Albeit, I tend to be skeptical of concepts such as collective guilt, which overlooks the various representations of the communist past by distinct social groups, this article claims that the individual response to shared feelings of collective guilt, due to complicity with the dictatorship, could result in meaning-making practices that make individuals, and possibly groups, more reflective and foster a usable narrative, or become unable to cope with the sense of collective guilt.

However, the article could have made use of a well-established literature that discusses strategies of dealing with an authoritarian past without simply limiting their literature review to a set of conceptual definitions of the main concepts the authors use and stating that the study focuses only on the Albanian case study. A more extensive and thorough literature review would have been helpful to convey the actual contribution of the article in the relevant literature. A potential contradiction of the article's theoretical framework is the difficulty in reconciling a general, abstract, and group-based concept such as collective guilt and a more empirical and individualized conceptualization such as individual meaning-making practices. With hindsight, one could argue that the narrative analysis conducted by the authors could have provided sufficient empirical evidence to understand the social and cultural background of those respondents who experienced a sense of collective guilt or responsibility of supporting the dictatorship. Although, the authors do differentiate between individuals who have passively obeyed to the communist power and those who were accomplice in the exercise of such an illegitimate power, I think the authors could have emphasized these findings more.

One of the drawbacks or the limitation of the article is that it does not provide actual empirical evidence based on statements, formulations and ideas of the respondents but merely summarizes the dominant themes that appear in the data collection. I think the argument of the article would have benefited from excerpts from the narratives written and provided by the participants in this research. On the other hand, the validity of the findings would have been enhanced. Although the focus of the article is on existential collective guilt I wonder if the participants in the study showed a sense of nostalgia towards the dictatorship or manifested strong ideological convictions regardless of or in spite of the economic and social transformations after 1990 in Albania. This brings me to one of the limitations of the article mentioned by the authors themselves. It is indicated in the text that the respondents were asked to write about their sense of collective guilt in their stories about the dictatorship's past. I wonder whether such a methodological choice would have made the respondents more inclined to accept a sense of collective guilt even if there was none. It would have been better for the

respondents to have written their own 'narrative' or representation of the dictatorship without an explicit reference that they address a sense of collective guilt.