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Materiality and Landscape of Mushroom-Shaped Bunkers in Albania

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A Child of Two Worlds: 
Materiality and Landscape of Mushroom 
Shaped Bunkers in Albania

Emily Jane Glass

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for 
award of the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts, Department of Anthropology and Archaeology.

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Abstract

Between 1944 and 1991 Albania experienced a distinctive Cold War conflict with shifting partnerships under the communist dictator Enver Hoxha. His cult of personality and an indoctrination of the Albanian population left an inheritance of paranoia, xenophobia, naivety, mistrust, and fear. The legacies of that period are encapsulated within the country’s mushroom-shaped bunkers (henceforth MSBs). These ubiquitous concrete forms were installed across the Albanian landscape in great numbers as part of a bunkerisation scheme which drew in much of the population.

The consequence of this level of involvement has meant that these objects encapsulate complex layers of memory, meaning and symbolism for many Albanians. This thesis uses archaeological and anthropological approaches to draw out elements of MSB materiality and examine the bunkerisation impact on people, culture, and landscape. MSBs have endured for just over fifty years in the landscape and psyche of Albania. For almost half this time they served to reinforce a Cold War mentality of xenophobic paranoia, visually communicated by their repetitive omnipotent brute form. This ensured that the post-1991 half of their social life has been as an object tolerated with suspicious unease until intermittent functional re-uses gave way to more active engagements.

This research is situated in the interdisciplinary study of modern conflict archaeology and utilises such an approach towards the landscape and materiality of MSBs in Albania. It considers that MSBs are highly charged agents of social and political change which have maintained a relevance, function, and degree of potency throughout Albania’s post-communist period. There has been an increased rate of MSB destruction, intensely so from 2011–2013, meaning this research is timely and will include the results of fieldwork prior, during and after this period. The absence of MSBs within landscapes has not been reflected by their removal from the psyche of Albanians. This thesis will examine how post-communist engagements and recommodifications using the distinctive MSB shape and form have maintained a powerful agency which has redefined and reshaped these objects within a modern Albania.

This thesis explores the MSB landscapes of two border areas of southern Albania to draw out
experiences of Cold War conflict and examine how the past is remembered or intentionally forgotten to assist socio-economic transition. It will also illustrate the juxtaposition of how different people can view the same object, whether they be Albanian, foreign or members of the Albanian diaspora, and how these narratives can contribute to the formation of object biographies. Diversity of opinion is a crucial aspect for the consideration of how and why people have engaged with MSBs if we are to ascertain whether such a contested artefact might be utilised as a benefit in the future. Finally, it will examine how MSBs have become synonymous with modern Albania and been used, rightly or wrongly, to promote Albania to foreigners in ways which are sometimes problematic.

Cover Image: Type 1 MSB on Ksamil Peninsula coastline, before and after painting 2008/2009 (© author)
PhD Acknowledgements

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Author’s Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Emily Jane Glass

DATE: 13th August 2021
Author’s Note

Parts of this thesis have previously been published in modified versions as:


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Chapter 1

Introduction

In a twenty-first century Albania, the mushroom-shaped bunker (MSB) has become an icon, but not to Albanians. Enver Hoxha, Albania’s communist dictator for more than 40 years, created a ‘deep-red land of Marxist mystery’ (Gardiner 1976: 9), which was heavily fortified by a bunker defence that now, in retrospect, is considered a profligate waste of resources. In post-communist Albania, MSBs installed across the landscape have been ignored, re-used, or destroyed by people living around them, whereas they have piqued the artistic and curious imaginations of many foreign visitors and members of the Albanian diaspora.

During the Cold War, physical expressions of Hoxha’s dogmata were cast in militarised concrete across Albania’s landscape within the context of a scarred archaeological palimpsest of modern conflict. Some of these militarised installations, infrastructure and varied bunker types can be attributed to differing phases of Albania’s political relations with the wider world. MSBs are the most omnipresent structure created under communism\(^1\) and are firmly embedded in the latter period of Chinese relations through to later isolation. Much of communist Albania’s material legacy remains to symbolise a turbulent political history and Hoxha’s ardent approach to self-preservation; however, the remaining resource continues to diminish as the country develops.

The replication of the MSB form in miniature by Albanians within tourism initiatives, Cold War heritage, and artworks has only served to reinforce the symbolic association of object to nation. This is an unofficial representation which, while it may distinguish Albania in an increasingly globalised world, does not do so for most Albanians, for whom the black double-headed eagle on their national flag is their symbol of identity and nation. Hoxha’s determination to keep Albania independent and localised for Albanians was exemplified by the installation of thousands of MSBs across the country. Designed to repel foreigners, this isolationist material culture was created during the second half of Albania’s Cold War conflict

\(^1\) The term ‘communist’ is primarily used throughout this thesis rather than ‘socialist’ as, even though both ideologies were used by the Party, the former ideology resonates more with the Marxist-Leninist stance of Hoxha within Albania’s Cold War.
from the late 1960s to 1989 but has transformed in international perception to represent not just the communist period, but the country itself.

The interdisciplinary approach of modern conflict archaeology adopted here has enabled an examination of MSB materiality to investigate relations between people and object over time, from their conception, manufacture, installation, use and post-communist engagements – a long and complex biography. This chapter introduces and situates the research using Albania’s recent past to provide a relevant historical background to locate the investigation in its socio-political context.

The distinctive trajectory of Albanian communist relationships and isolationist strategies will be highlighted to demonstrate how exceptional the MSB programme was within the Eastern Bloc. The reasons and personal motivations for this choice of research topic, objectives and questions will be detailed and a definition of MSBs provided. The required permissions and challenges of undertaking this research will be outlined and the chapter will conclude with a thesis outline which illustrates how a single type of mass-produced communist object, the MSB, can be documented and analysed from 1967 to the present.

Research Topic Selection and Motivations

I first encountered Albanian MSBs in 2001 when I travelled to the country to work on archaeological excavations with the Butrint Foundation at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint. The journeys between Sarandë to our Ksamil hotel and the dig site from the rear of a Land Rover caused the Albanian landscape to pass by in a blur of hilly scrub, coastline and partially completed buildings. The reality of Albania’s novel, yet bizarre bunkerisation situation was brought home to me during a walk around the Ksamil hinterland. I first noticed one of these installations, and then spotted another and more. This dawning awareness made me feel apprehensive. There were far more overgrown domes across my field of vision than I had originally assumed. Aside from the mixture of curiosity (how many?) and incomprehension

2 Throughout this thesis I have used the Albanian spelling of placenames, whereby places end in ‘ë’ rather than the international versions. For example, ‘Sarandë’ rather than ‘Saranda’ or ‘Tiranë’ rather than ‘Tirana’. The only exception is where the international version appears within a quote or in the bibliography as part of another person’s work. This was due to a greater familiarity with the Albanian form from time spent in the country.
(why?), I was left with the sense that I was being watched. The dark embrasure appeared like an eye looking at me even though I was sure that no-one was inside.

This instinct was clearly absurd — communism was over, Albania was no longer at war so the bunkers must be empty. Despite this rationale, these multiple and seemingly unnatural domed inserts into the landscape felt like an alien phenomenon that exuded a cold concrete anxiety. This was my first experience of the potent agency embodied within the mushroom-shaped bunker, and I was a foreigner.

After 2001, I spent each summer excavating archaeological sites in Albania until 2012, and it was this that inspired my choice of research topic. Working on Greco-Roman and Medieval remains while staying in Ksamil surrounded by reinforced concrete MSBs and communist buildings was an interesting juxtaposition. This was particularly evident along the coast in the close shadow of Corfu on the former East to West split, now European Union to non-EU division. Discussions with Albanian archaeologists on site and local people in the town piqued my interest in the Cold War era and over time I came to view these MSBs as the ultimate expression of that time. I realised later that such things were not so simple, and I was intrigued as many people told me their bunker-story as an encounter that happened to them, family, or friends. This is when I realised that like some of the people I talked to, MSBs were also a ‘Child of Two Worlds’, with a half-life under communism and an afterlife in a transitional democracy.

In Ksamil, the multi-layered nature of these structures was evident in those which were brightly painted or contained recent graffiti and evidence of kids ‘hanging out’ that denoted the freedom of a democracy that, at the time, was only ten years old. MSBs encapsulated my own experience of Albania as a once closed country that I was now able to explore. During the excavation months and beyond, I travelled to other parts of the country and saw the extent of these mushroom forms installed across urban and rural areas, hills, valleys, and roadsides. This included many trips to Gjirokastër where the scale of MSB installation in the Drino Valley was evident as we descended the Muzinë Pass and multiple stop lines came into view across the wide plain which ran towards the Greek border. During wider travels, I noted how there were variations in the form of MSBs and that there were demonstrably fewer installed within the central interior of the country when compared to the more familiar border zones.

I chose Albanian bunkers as the topic for my 2008 Bristol University Historical Archaeology MA dissertation which explored layers of meaning, memory, and conflict around
these structures, but I barely scratched the surface of research potential. It was a topic frequently included in discussions about Albania by journalists, television presenters and in travelogues, but only one academic article had taken this engagement further archaeologically as a symbol of domination (Galaty et al. 1999). Sources with detailed or referenced information were scarce and communist publications were ideologically biased and did not cover national defence structures. MSBs and most other bunker types were not included within communist propaganda as the State did not view this topic for photographers ‘with good eyes’ (Ermir Hoxha, 2018, pers. comm. 12 October).

After the MA, I planned to investigate deeper into how the MSBs programme was conceived and installed under communism and explore where their legacies are situated within modern Albania. I saw an abundance of material within the Albanian landscape and the potential to use these structures to examine Albania’s Cold War experience using an anthropologically-informed Modern Conflict Archaeological approach. I was intrigued by the intensity of Albania’s conflict landscape, which was not defined by zones, the whole environment had been militarised. Reinforced concrete MSBs had been inserted as individual positions into the daily-life landscapes of home, school or work and the roadside routes used to journey between. In rural areas, multiple stop-lines of MSBs were installed along the hillsides, flat plains, and coastline, all ready and in position for an invasion that never happened. MSBs were clearly part of a broader tangible and intangible military infrastructure intended for the defence of Albania, but it was these structures that piqued my interest most and I became fascinated by them.

Historical Background and the Creation of Communist Albania

Located in the southern Balkans, Albania today holds a population of almost 3.5 million across a mountainous terrain of 28,748km² (Figure 1). Known as Shiqipëria (Land of the Eagles) to Albanians, land borders are shared with Greece and components of former Yugoslavia: North Macedonia, Kosovo, and Montenegro. The coastline runs for approximately 476km along the west and south-west borders on the seas of the Adriatic and Ionian, only 76km from Italy over the Strait of Otranto. Albania’s strategic geographical position can partly account for the
history of foreign invasion (Marmullaku 1975: 73), which created the Albanian communist determination to ensure the independence and territorial integrity of the country.
Since the sixth century BC, Albania has been invaded and colonised by Greeks, Romans, Bulgars, Normans, Italians, Slavs, Venetians and eventually the Ottomans in the late fourteenth century. After much Albanian resistance, the country finally became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1468 AD. Under the leadership of Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu (Skanderbeg), the Albanians surmounted a 25-year insurgency against the Ottoman occupiers. The ability of Skanderbeg to unite Albanian tribes and his military success in repelling a larger and better equipped foe gave him hero-status. He has since served as a symbol of unity and strength to Albanians when they have struggled to confirm their national identity (Vickers 1999: 9).

Albania was granted independence from Ottoman rule by the Great Powers between 1912 and 1913. After the Balkan and First World Wars, Ahmet Zogu, the leader of the Progressive Party, acceded to power and within three years proclaimed himself King of the Albanians. To consolidate his position, King Zog resorted to Italian assistance which brought the ‘outside forces within Albania’ problem back to the fore, and the country was subject to economic and political hegemony under Benito Mussolini (Gilkes 2003: 38). This resulted in Italy’s annexation of Albania in 1939, when the country became one of the first victims of the Axis powers at the outset of the Second World War. King Zog fled to Greece, creating a power vacuum that anti-Italian and anti-Zog forces sought to fill, and which set the stage for an internal power struggle in the county (Prifti 1978: 10).

During the Second World War, an intense and costly Partisan struggle was mounted in Albania against Italian and German occupying forces. The Communist Party of Albania (PKSH) was founded in 1941 (renamed in 1948 as the Party of Labour of Albania (PPSH)), with Hoxha voted in as Party Secretary. The Partisan Army of the PKSH was successful through their superior organisation and discipline over other nationalist, monarchist, and factional-left wing groups, and through their ideological conviction and resolve to win (Vickers 1999: 160). They had been supported by most peasants for whom the socialist revolution was an expression of vital national interests to remain an independent entity (Marmullaku 1975: 59). After Albania’s November 1944 Liberation, the provisional communist government (formed the previous year) settled in Tiranë with Hoxha as Prime Minister. At the January 1946 proclamation of the People’s Republic of Albania, Hoxha was sworn in again for this role, which he fulfilled until his death in April 1985. Hoxha’s life will not be explored fully in this thesis.

An impoverished Albania emerged from the Second World War with a shattered
economy and an urgent need for reconstruction and reform (Vickers 1999: 165). The country was subsequently described as being ‘probably the most backward in Europe’ (Ash 1974: 137), a situation of which Hoxha had been acutely aware and which motivated him towards modernisation to improve Albania’s position. Just as ‘every culture weaves its world out of image and symbol’ (Daniels and Cosgrove 1988: 8), Hoxha utilised communist ideology to create a centrally controlled socialist state which was able to ensure the leading role of the Communist Party over all Albanians (Kaser 2001: 627). The way this ambitious reorganisation and modernisation of the industrial landscape was to be achieved was described by Frasheri in his 1964 survey of Albania. The country would be elevated from its backward technical, economic, and cultural situation by means of socialist industrialisation, agricultural collectivisation, and electrification. This was to be achieved:

... in the shortest time possible, by attracting into battle all the people and by employing all available material and financial resources of the country. (Frashëri 1964: 338).

A later study noted that Albania’s peasants and industrial workers were subject to long hours of work, low incomes, wretched housing, and poor living conditions. All of which were, by this point, inextricably linked to the highly centralised and capricious planning methods of a tyrannical communist regime (Logoreci 1977: 149) that privileged a social identity over primordial identities through the mitigation of communist ideologies (Barjarba 2004: 233).

Albania had been vulnerable after the Second World War, with limited human and material resources to rebuild and modernise the country’s infrastructure. United Nations assistance concluded in 1947 and the still shattered economy was in dire need of funds. The following year a close wartime bond between Hoxha’s Albania and Tito’s Yugoslavia became a threat to Hoxha’s leadership. The suggestion, that Albania could become a Yugoslav colony and subservient to Belgrade, was unacceptable to Hoxha and the association was severed. Hoxha turned to the Soviet Union of Socialist Republics (USSR) where Hoxha embraced Stalinism, but subsequently rejected the Khrushchevites. After a period of deteriorating relations, Albania split with the USSR in 1961, after the Sino-Soviet schism, and forged an alliance with Mao Tsetung and the People’s Republic of China which lasted until 1978 when ties were dissolved over ideological and political issues.

Albania benefitted greatly from these shifting associations as they provided much
needed financial, technical, and material aid for economic and military developments. In addition, within the context of the Sino-Albanian relationship, Hoxha embarked upon a Cultural and Ideological Revolution in 1967 as a ‘crusade to “eradicate the remnants of the past’” (Mehilli 2017: 220). Amongst other changes such as further economic collectivisation, Albania abolished military ranks and created a People’s Army in its drive towards a total socialist revolution (Marku 2017: 378).

These choices facilitated the goals of the Party which were: to retain power, to attain economic self-sufficiency in as many sectors as possible and create a new, Marxist-Leninist value system. The support given towards national security and the military enabled Hoxha to achieve one of his primary objectives; to preserve Albania’s independence and territorial integrity (Biberaj 1990: 85). After 1978, future partnerships were rejected and Albania embarked on an isolationist path which was sustained beyond Hoxha’s death, when the country was labelled ‘the last stronghold of Stalinism in Europe’ (Prifti 1978: 262). The trajectory of Albania’s communist era is often considered unique, and the country described as ‘a Socialist Maverick’ (Biberaj 1990), a result of shifting alliances and incomprehension as to how Albania could afford to sever relationships which provided so much necessary aid. Recent work examining the potentials of Albanian archive documents has challenged the perpetuation of Albania’s uniqueness in the world by demonstrating how smaller anti-capitalist countries navigated their own form of geopolitics (Mehilli 2019: 95).

The regime placed the defence and independence of Albania at the forefront of its ideological stance. This system was sustained by Hoxha using his own brand of ‘Albanianism’, a nineteenth century term coined by the Ottoman Albanian poet Vaso Pasha (Duijzings 2002: 61; Standish 2002: 121). Hoxha used this to create a xenophobic nationalism of which a true interpretation was essentially Stalinism (Endresen 2012: 67), or ‘Albanian-Stalinism,’ which served to eliminate religious competition and was rooted in previous waves of foreign conquests and domination to forge a collective sense of identity. The post-Ottoman partition and loss of other Albanian-inhabited territories had psychologically scarred the Albanian nation, fostering xenophobia and a siege-mentality. The traditional fear of Albanian dismemberment and foreign domination was reinforced by Hoxha, who developed an obsession with internal and external enemies of the State (Biberaj 1990: 86). Unable to tolerate competing ideologies, Hoxha used nationalism to abolish the institution of religion in 1967 and
replace it with a cult of the Party and Hoxha. Religion was a symbol of foreign predation and an obstacle to modernisation, thus Albania became ‘the first atheist state in the world’ (Prifti 1978: 150, 258).

Hoxha commanded unwavering loyalty to the ideology and politics of Stalin and the Stalinist concept of statecraft. This adherence to classic communist dogmata meant that Party leaders were able to wield absolute power and control over the country (Prifti 1978: 259). Political files, known as ‘biographies’ were created for all individuals which detailed family genealogies and histories to identify and control potential risks to the government (de Rapper 2006; Kretsi 2007). People who contravened the system would be ‘de-classed’ and judged as having a bad biography that extended to their immediate and wider family (King and Vullnetari 2016: 200). In addition to this, a network of Secret Police (Sigurimi) was employed to control and inform on the population, an apparatus which was denounced in 1991 by the writer Dritëro Agolli:

Man became a collective with the personality of a crowd, without individuality or identity... People became afraid of one another, and they saw a spy in everyone. They became afraid of everyone around them, even their family. (Biberaj 1998: 104).

Pressure to decentralise authority and liberalise social order was stubbornly resisted, as any relaxation of Stalinist rule would threaten Hoxha’s authority. The leadership pursued Cold War politics to ensure that a sustained ‘war psychosis’ was maintained within the psyche of Albanians (Prifti 1978: 259).

Despite the history of invasion and threat from more powerful neighbours, Hoxha had succeeded in maintaining Albania’s independence. As the country emerged from isolation, however, the full impact of his terror tactics and isolation policy on the psychology of Albanians was to become apparent (Glenny 2000: 569). In the most recent biography of Enver Hoxha, Fevziu stated that the communist period had been:

... a nightmare of tragic dimensions: in his 46 years of rule, 5,037 men and 450 women were executed; 16,788 men and 7,367 women were convicted and sentenced to three to 35 years of imprisonment, terms which were often extended by reconvictions in jail; 70,000 people were interned; and 354 foreign nationals were executed by firing squad, of whom 95 were Albanians from Kosovo. (2016: 259).
The 1989 collapse of Communist regimes led to the transformation of the Eastern European political landscape. In Albania, state apparatus began to be dismantled in 1991 when the first unrestricted elections were held after much rioting. For Albanians, the major impact of exposure to global processes was the realisation of the impoverishment and inadequacy of their country. Hoxha had persuaded Albanians that their country had the highest standard of living in Europe (Hamilton 1992: 11). Realising the truth was the catalyst for numerous strikes, student demonstrations, mass migration and the destruction of state property in a violent reaction to half a century of repression (Hall 1999: 168).

To erase the past, state infrastructure was destroyed and farming virtually abandoned which created serious food shortages and halted economic activity (Kaser 2001: 629). Psychologically, it was as if the ‘world had come to an end and there would be no future needs’ (de Waal 1996: 173). The fear conditioned into Albanians through MSBs had turned to hatred of all that represented the regime. Ironically MSBs escaped this newfound “freedom to destroy” (Drakulić 1996: 55) as they were too robust to provide an immediate emotional response within the frenzy of breaking. The Democratic Party of Albania (DPA) was elected in 1992 and became the first non-communist government in almost fifty years.

Albania was suffering from abject poverty and a quick recovery was unrealistic; a devastated economy, industrial and agricultural equipment outdated or destroyed, and management systems collapsed. Additional problems followed the financial collapse of government-backed pyramid schemes in 1997. Thousands lost their savings and there was serious rioting, anarchy, and a near civil war which killed 2,000 people. The government resigned, army and police deserted their posts, and almost a million weapons were looted from armouries by the rioters (Jarvis 2000: 16). The cause and effect of these catastrophic events have been researched and documented by Biberaj (1998), Jarvis (2000), Musaraj (2019), Vaughan-Whitehead (1999) and Vickers and Pettifer (1997) and will not be detailed further. The social upheaval caused by the pyramid scheme collapse was calmed by the promise of new elections and the installation of a United Nations Protection Force.

After 1997, the government attempted to change the country’s international image, and discard its Cold War label as the most sinister and least-known Iron Curtain country in the Eastern Bloc (Hall 1999: 162). Yet during the 2000s this ‘least-known’ status was capitalised on and promoted by slogans such as ‘Albania, the Last Secret’ and ‘Albania – Yours to Discover’ with
successive governments considering the tourist industry as synonymous with economic growth (Hala 2008). Tourist-propelled modernisation led to the destruction of many MSBs, and at the same time increased tourist numbers (6.4 million in 2019) have influenced Albanian perceptions of what constitutes their heritage.

Since the late 2000s, communist themed bunker tours and walking trails have been offered to tourists, with more recent developments being the conversion of underground nuclear complexes and other Cold War buildings into museums detailing communist conflict and daily life. The reworking of Albanian Cold War remains for tourists on local and national levels has the potential to address the surplus of Hoxha-era relics within the landscape and take control over stereotypical perceptions of Albania’s communist past. In her study of the Albanians, Vickers stated that:

> As always in Albania, settling accounts with the past plays a large part in the reality of the present causing the country to remain entrenched in the politics of conflict. (Vickers 1999: 255).

Albanians have not yet developed the contemporary tendency to fetishize ruins of the recent past, as has occurred in the West. This is likely due to their drive to become non-communist, move away from a lack of consumerism and race towards a Western-orientated capitalism. Ultimately this is encapsulated in the national desire to become politically and economically globalised through membership of the European Union. This is an expression of what I term ‘Albamodernity’, where the aura of all things new and modern have overridden any sense of retrospective materialism. Possession and display of modern non-Albanian goods or desirable global brands also highlight issues of class, wealth, and status within communities who, until recently, had broadly considered themselves equal.

Albamodernity encompasses personal and collective mindsets developed out of necessity to negotiate the various rulers and regimes that have dominated Albania in the past. Through their history, Albanians became predisposed to accept and adapt as a mechanism to progress when outside rulers enforced conditions, such as religious conversion to Islam through Ottoman incentives (Hall 1999: 166). Galaty takes this concept back as far as prehistory where the ‘Illyrian reaction to Greek colonisation thus sets a precedent that is repeated through Albanian history: accommodation, adaption, and survival against all odds’ (Galaty
The Albamodernity dynamic most recently stems from post-Second World War communist propaganda for a ‘New-Albania’ which told people that ‘we are the year zero’ (e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Qf-7Vw7uuQ). This was reinforced when relations with outside partners were severed to instil fresh mindsets and expectations into the population. Within the context of post-1991 transition, this mechanism was utilised by the newly formed Democratic Party who called for people to ‘destroy the old’ through their opposition newspaper ‘Rilindja Demokratike’ (Democratic Rebirth) (Anon 1991). Ignoring or erasing the past as a mechanism to move on has encouraged a selective forgetting of those communist elements which do not suit current national agendas (Galaty 2018: 121). This is most notably demonstrated by the denial or failure of successive governments when addressing the exiles, imprisonments, tortures, and executions of communism because of a reliance on present economic realities (Amy 2010: 209). Within the context of MSBs it is illustrated by their lack of official protection and destruction while communist heritage tourism is promoted to foreigners.

Defining Albanian Mushroom-Shaped Bunkers (MSBs)

Militarily in Albania these structures were generally known as ‘QZ’ or Qendër Zjarri, which means Centre of Fire or Firing Position. Within my research I adopt the term ‘mushroom-shaped bunker’, or ‘MSB’ for brevity, to describe these structures because it is entirely a non-communist Albanian term (see Chapter 3 for discussion of communist terms). I have been told that describing these structures as mushrooms (këpurdha in Albanian) has only been in use since communism fell and usually only in discussions with foreigners. Two former military personnel interviewees\(^3\) told me that the first time they had heard the term ‘mushroom’ was during our discussions and more generally, Albanians tend to call them Bunkeri or Bunkerët. I am not the first person to liken these Albanian structures to mushrooms due to their form, a

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\(^3\) Following McWilliams, I chose not to use the term ‘informant’ within my ethnographic interviews or discussions of results as it has negative connotations within the context of Cold War informer culture (2013: 23), which was particularly harsh in Albania.
domed cap with straight body and how their numbers appeared to sprout across all parts of the landscape (for early examples see: Anastasi 1991: 4; Barber 1993).

Albania also contains larger domed artillery bunkers, known in Albania as ‘PZ’ or Pikë Zjarri, which means Fire Point. These measure roughly 8–9m in diameter reaching heights of 5m and were positioned on the ground surface of flat coastal areas and the foothills of plains during the 1970–80s. PZ bunkers are often combined with the smaller MSBs in discussions of Albania’s ‘mushroom bunkers’ (e.g. Stefa and Mydyti 2012) and would militarily have worked as part of the same defensive strategy. However, I would argue that these two forms are conceptually and physically different and as such have been distinguished from one another within this thesis.

The more numerous MSBs are spread more widely across the landscape and have a greater intertwined relationship with people, and thus richer and more informative biographies. They were intended for use by the People’s Army for training and defence with maintenance of the structure and trenches undertaken by local civilians. PZ bunkers were mostly positioned in border zones, although there are none on the Ksamil Peninsula, and contained large-calibre guns only to be used by military personnel. The focus of this thesis is MSBs, but it was inevitable that PZ and other bunker types were encountered during research and these will be explored in support of attitudes or landscape treatments of MSBs.

There is no consensus regarding the number of MSBs in Albania, which can become additionally confusing when it is considered that all types of communist bunkers, tunnels and shelters are collectively referred to as ‘bunkers’. This could account for discrepancies across the literature, with estimates ranging from 180,000 (Kaser 2001) to 300,000 (Hall 1994) and up to one million (Drakulić 1996; Hamilton 1992; Rugg 1994). The average reported number is between 600,000 and 750,000 and will be discussed further in Chapter 3. For the relatively small country of Albania, even the lower end of this scale would represent an excess of bunkers that was disproportionate to its size and population.

In discussions involving bunkers, it is usual to think about twentieth century conflict architecture connected to the First or Second World War, often subterranean and situated within the wider context of relatively short European-led conflicts. MSBs are different: they are small but numerous defensive structures produced during the second half of Albania’s Cold War. They are not all created to the same design and their refinement on a local Albanian
manufacturing level was indirectly supported by China’s provision of financial aid, materials, industrial and technological assistance. Early types were installed from the late 1960s with an upscale in production from 1973 when standardised designs using prefabricated elements were introduced, a process which lasted until 1989. MSBs were ideologically infused with the same qualities as those projected by the Party about themselves: solid with the strength of steel and formed from the ‘heroic material’ of concrete (Mehilli 2017: 178).

Unlike well-known bunker walls (e.g. the Second World War’s German-built Atlantic Wall), MSB defences were constructed to a depth that defined and covered the whole nation and should be regarded as a statement of land ownership within the nationalist context of their construction. This defence is characterised by multiple segmented lines comprised of superterranean or semi-subterranean MSBs along border zones which decreased in density towards the interior of Albania. MSBs spanned the population bridge between civilians and military in line with the concept of a People’s Defence of the Homeland. MSBs were combined with Party propaganda, playing on the fear of outside forces, to create a message of fear and instil a war-psychosis onto the population. In this way they were a visual and nationalistic tool of control and domination, a monumental architecture utilised by the Party to retain internal power with the hope that any invasion attempt would be deterred.

The MSB also represents a fundamental part of an Albanian mid-Cold War ideal that the guerrilla warfare techniques utilised successfully during the Second World War could be recycled nostalgically in the minds of a people and embedded in the landscape of a country to survive invasion. The validity and necessity of this concentrated militarised landscape against any invasion is debatable and, in many ways, irrelevant to this thesis, but their form, numbers, intent and population engagement are unique in a global context.

Militarily, these bunkers were not a stand-alone defence, but the experience of communist Albania is reified through MSBs over any other military architecture they produced during the Cold War. Like the Albanian people, MSBs are collective and individual entities moulded under a centralised regime in their efforts to create the New-Albania. No other twentieth century conflict architecture is directly comparable in a manner which reflects the temporal, spatial, and ideological qualities encapsulated by Albanian MSBs. This has created a conflict-derived interrelationship between the Albanian landscape, people and MSBs, an affective-material complex which has endured long beyond the fall of the regime which
Research Objectives and Questions

This MSB research was initiated in 2008 during my MA but became official on a doctoral level from 2010 when I started as a part-time PhD student. If this had been completed within 3 or 4 years, it would have been a very different thesis as the status of MSBs in modern Albanian society are constantly evolving and shifting. This reflects their relationship with the people who encounter them and is a situation that will continue far beyond the conclusion of this thesis.

This study will examine MSBs from conception to the present as collective and individual entities to offer insight into comprehending the impact and legacy of this dense landscape militarisation, from local to global. A typology has been devised (outlined in Chapter 3) to comprehend the evolution of MSB structural variations and aid GIS mapping of MSBs within the study areas. The following objectives and questions will be examined within this thesis:

Research Objectives

- To make a significant contribution towards Cold War material culture studies by focusing on a single, but numerous, object within communist Albania.
- To demonstrate how an interdisciplinary Modern Conflict Archaeology approach can contribute to an examination of a ‘stand-off’ landscape without conflict.
- To explore how an object that signifies a political system, e.g. the Albanian MSB within the Cold War, can be renegotiated once that regime has passed and create new afterlives involving reconfigured cosmologies and additional narratives.
- To illustrate how the relatively small MSB artefact constitutes a larger landscape artefact and how that relationship has changed over time.
Research Questions

- How did the mushroom-shaped bunker programme impact upon the Albanian landscape and on people and culture?
- Can an archaeological examination of MSB materiality and the anthropological use of living-memory signify a route by which subject-object relations can create biographies of Cold War concrete relics?
- To what degree have post-communist re-engagements with MSBs re-defined their symbolic value and perception within contemporary Albania?
- How many MSBs were constructed during the communist period?

Importance and Relevance of this Work

Prior to this research, there have been few attempts to investigate MSBs beyond looking at their high numbers, installed into the landscape by a ‘crazy’ dictator. There are many myths however, such as they were nuclear proof, and that the designer was shelled within the prototype to prove his conviction in the scheme. My research aimed to move away from stereotypes and examine the MSBs as individual and collective entities which reflect the experiences and life of the Albanian people.

In taking a modern conflict archaeological and anthropological approach to the creation and afterlife of the MSB landscape, different facets of Albania’s Cold War period can be drawn out and their relevance examined in the present. Although Albania was not invaded, the country, landscape and people were prepared for it in an industrialised manner by a leadership who overhauled the entire pre-communist system. This leadership created new centres for manufacturing, agriculture, and industry, all centrally controlled, and much of it directed towards the militarisation of the landscape for defence.

It has been 30 years since the fall of the communist regime, and only ten years since the once ubiquitous MSB started a physical shift towards the fate of more traditional archaeological remains. The rapid expansion of many urban centres and extensive road widening schemes saw many MSBs displaced before a period of mechanised destruction
occurred from 2011–2013 when most of these structures were broken up to remove their steel content for recycling. However, it is only the distinctive visual form of domed caps that has disappeared from the landscape. Most of the broken-down concrete structure remains in the ground, slowly being grown over, but still identifiable as a conflict-related landscape scar. Where whole MSBs or single prefabricated elements are considered useful they have been removed and incorporated into other constructions and can often be identified as a form of twenty-first century spolia. Like other militarised legacies of communist Albania, MSBs are not designated as heritage assets and have no official protection; they are at the mercy of their location in the landscape as to whether they will be destroyed or remain for a while longer. Either way, an as interdisciplinary approach as possible has been brought to bear on these extraordinary artefacts.

Geographical Scope and Research Data Selection

Due to the density of MSB installations across Albania, it became apparent that covering the whole country was simply not feasible within the confines of a PhD study. As much of Albania under communism was prescribed under the power of centralised rule, it is fair to assume that this was also the case for its militarisation. Two areas of southern Albania were chosen as a focus, influenced by my familiarity with these landscapes and contacts. The Drino Valley region of Gjirokastër County and the coastal Ksamil Peninsula both form part of Albania’s southern land and sea border with Greece (Figure 2). Under communism these were positioned directly on the junction between the two main competing ideologies of East and West where Albanian Cold War ideology was visibly expressed by MSB installations (Uzzell and Ballantyne 1998: 161).

To the West, this dividing line was perceived first as part of the Iron Curtain, then as a beachhead of China’s Bamboo Curtain until Albania shifted towards self-reliance. From the

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3 Bamboo Curtain is a political-ideological term utilised for China’s borders to distinguish it from the Iron Curtain after the 1960 Sino-Soviet rift (see Griffith 1963). This schism created a major fault line within the international Communist movement, with complex and often dangerous outcomes for crossing it (Mëhilli 2017: 13). During the subsequent Sino-Albanian relationship, Albania was viewed as a physical and political beachhead of China within the Mediterranean (Hamm 1963). This gave Hoxha the opportunity to be part of a greater political world and the ability to speak on global terms (Mëhilli 2017: 13), and China benefited from a reach that allowed the East to penetrate the Mediterranean and therefore Western Europe.
early years of Hoxha’s leadership it was of paramount importance that the landscape was reconfigured quickly to demonstrate a strong military presence along the borderlands. It was recognised that one of the greatest invasion threats to Albania was via the coast as interior border zones were predominantly mountainous but contained weak points where flat river plains ran between countries.

The CIA produced a map in 1950 which identified possible invasion routes into Albania (Figure 3). This demonstrates how both thesis study areas were considered as places of weakness by the West. The coastal Ksamil Peninsula is only 2km from the closest point of Corfu, and the Drino Valley has a wide flat plain that runs through the Greek border. These differing border geographies resulted in both areas being heavily militarised under communism. The pre-communist historical trajectory for each area is different, but it is this which has subsequently influenced how local people have engaged with MSBs in post-communism.
The southernmost part of Albania’s coastline is formed of the Ksamil Peninsula, located within the Municipality of Sarandë, Vlorë County. Lake Butrint is situated on the internal side of this linear ridge, meaning the study area is water-bound and smaller than the Drino Valley study area. Fieldwork on the Ksamil Peninsula was undertaken between 2008–2012, with additional visits in 2013 and 2017. The results yielded a greater emphasis on the evolution of the communist landscape, MSB production, local attitudes under communism and post-communist MSB re-use or decoration.

The Drino Valley is located within Gjirokastër County, and the area chosen for study runs from the Greek border to the Çajupi Plain, bound by steep mountain peaks on each side. Research visits were made to this area in 2008–2010, 2012 and 2017 to identify and research key locations of interest. The results noted the pace of change, particularly after large scale MSB destructions were initiated in 2011, as the militarisation of the flat Drino Valley Plain had been particularly dense. The production and installation of MSBs was also explored with a focus on post-communist engagements through the replication or use of the mushroom form within tourism initiatives.
Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 contains a review of existing literature to critically explore and situate this research into theoretical frameworks of sensoriality, material culture and landscape. Modern conflict archaeological and anthropological approaches to the Cold War will be outlined and a range of literature on communist Albania and MSBs detailed. This will illustrate how the perception of the MSB, as one of the most ubiquitous remnants of communism, has changed historically and socially and how such narratives can have implications towards identity.

The context of where this thesis is situated regarding similar and recent interdisciplinary modern conflict works, from which inspiration was taken will be discussed. The methodology used within this thesis will be explained and provide details of fieldwork visits for primary and secondary data collection. This will include the process of on-site and online mapping to create a digital map of MSB positions characterised using the MSB typology created for this thesis and outlined in Chapter 3. Finally, the scope of archaeological and anthropological enquiry, ethics and other permissions or challenges encountered within this research will be listed.

Chapter 3 will provide the conceptual framework created to examine MSBs for this thesis. The socio-political background which enabled the MSB programme to be instigated within Albania will be outlined and illustrate how psychologically, it became an incontrovertible scheme of works. The typology created to characterise and digitally map the five MSB types encountered within both study areas will be outlined with dates, maps, and image examples. Using the results of this digital analysis, the development of MSB types over time and common aspects of the bunkerisation programme related to both case study areas will be explored. Finally, the issue of MSB numbers will be addressed and situated within wider discussions through calculations based on the results of my digital mapping.

Chapter 4 contains the Ksamil Peninsula border case study area. It will examine how this landscape evolved to be developed under communism as part of national ideological and economic frameworks. The militarisation of this coastal border will be examined throughout the communist period which includes defences prior to the 1967 initiation of the MSB
programme. The four MSB types identified on the Ksamil Peninsula will be detailed along with manufacturing and installation processes to explore how this landscape functioned militarily and psychologically. Finally, post-communist re-uses of MSBs by local Albanians and foreigners will be examined to illustrate how these narratives have sustained MSB cultural biographies towards the present.

Chapter 5 presents the Drino Valley land border case study area. It will examine how this landscape developed such a heavy concentration of MSBs through communist land border policies. The area will be investigated through field visits and interviews at key MSB installation locations across the valley and their manufacture site at the Gjirokastër concrete factory. The five MSB types identified across the Drino Valley will be detailed and examined as a dense collective entity based on observations, explorations, and data from interviews. The impact on this landscape due to the mass MSB breaking of 2011–2013 will be investigated and discuss what this may mean for communist heritage tourism within an area known for its traditional Ottoman architecture. The touristification of MSBs by way of their replication as tourist souvenirs will also be explored in the city of Gjirokastër.

Chapter 6 presents themes drawn from both case study chapters to examine and analyse the militarised materiality and landscape of MSBs in Albania. The pros and cons of the MSB as an icon that represents present day Albania will be discussed and examine communist heritage tourism, foreign-fascination and how members of the Albanian diaspora have also taken the topic of bunkers forward in artistic projects. The wider impact of the 2011–2013 MSB destruction works will be threaded through wider discussions of re-use and recycling within tourist and heritage endeavours designed to attract people to Albania rather than repel them. The thesis objectives and research questions will be addressed with a critique of the limitations and challenges. Finally, potential future works will be discussed, and final conclusions presented.
Chapter 2

Literature Review and Methodology

For fifty years the Cold War was an undisputed fact, and that is all that matters. It influenced the lives of everyone who lived through it and left its mark in steel and concrete upon the face of the world. These concrete symbols of mutual distrust are the archaeology of war (McCamley 2009: 1).

Introduction

Albania’s Cold War experience can be considered unique. Its trajectory of shifting partnerships and location at the junction of an East–West global division creates an unmatched history of transposed relationships with other communist countries. The nearest parallel to Albania’s conflict-in-daily-life experience is North Korea, a political system that remains in place today. Both used heavy dogmata to create pure socialism, preserve territory and control the population, whilst also building an extraordinary depth of defence and a cult of the leader (Hall, 1990; Mëhilli 2015; White III 2018). In addition, access to official documents and objective information for both countries is restricted. Although not a surprise for North Korea, in the 30 years since communism collapsed, Albania has not fully come to terms with its past. When compared with other former communist European countries, the opening of Albanian archives and the availability of official dossiers from defunct government divisions has been a very slow and so far, incomplete process (Mëhilli 2019).

Albania’s restriction on archive information means that an interdisciplinary modern conflict archaeological approach is well-suited towards combining the dialogues of people and material to explore place and object-based narratives of past and present. This is particularly useful for countries such as Albania where constraints exist on access to historical documentation or information from state published literature is subject to bias. For this thesis, it has been fully appropriate to investigate and analyse MSBs using a theoretical framework derived from publications on archaeology, anthropology, material culture studies, landscape
studies, memory, cultural geography and sensoriality. The legitimacy of utilising such a broad approach towards MSBs will be explored from their 1967 conception towards their impact in present landscapes. Before considering how best to operationalise this new theoretical framework however, it is important that consideration is given to the scholarship of and for Albania, locally, nationally, and internationally.

The following sets out the basis on which this research has been built with an overview of Cold War and bunkers as modern conflict archaeology and a wider theoretical review of sensoriality, material culture and landscape literature. Communist Albania and publications specific to Albanian bunkers are explored to give this thesis context and highlight key aspects of their historical development. The review section is concluded by siting this thesis alongside recent interdisciplinary modern conflict archaeology, heritage, and social archaeological works from where inspiration and methodological approach was taken.

**Modern Conflict Archaeology and the Cold War**

This investigation of Albania’s Cold War bunkerised experience is situated within the interdisciplinary field of modern conflict archaeology, an archaeological and anthropological approach which views conflict as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It transforms the material worlds of soldiers and civilians through the creation of new experiences and ideas within the pressurised theatre of warfare, either on fighting or home fronts. This approach to conflicts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries encompasses elements of social archaeology, public archaeology, and anthropological archaeology, and is one of the many so-called archaeologies of the contemporary past (Saunders 2007: vi; Saunders 2010: 46).

Modern conflicts are defined by their technologies and are all wars of matériel (Saunders 2001a: 476). This latter term embraces the physical remains of military and civilian conflict, the experiences and observations of the people involved and the place in the landscape into which they were embedded, created, transported, or utilised to varying degrees of success (Schofield et al 2002: 1). The mass industrial warfare of modern conflict combined with conscript armies leave memory traces and perspectives from those who ordinarily may not have been engaged with the military (Winter and Sivan 2000: 17).
This is particularly evident for Cold War conflicts where ongoing geopolitical tensions which defined that era (Schofield and Cocroft 2007: 13) created a constant warlike setting where both people and landscape were prepared for conflict. MSBs are communist Albania’s most significant matériel response to Cold War conflict, and this is reflected by their programmes of manufacture, networks of installation and militarised consumption. These structures represent one of the most robust remnants of Albania’s Cold War which have proved difficult to destroy physically and to eradicate psychologically.

Schofield and Cocroft have highlighted that the recent nature of Cold War sites can be beneficial for study as they are representative of a specific time (1946–89) across the globe which comprise networks of physical and less tangible material legacies. In addition, the archaeological record of many places of the Cold War have been relatively unfiltered by time (Schofield and Cocroft 2007: 13) when compared to older sites of conflict, particularly those situated within militarised zones.

This was certainly the case in Albania until the late 2000s, when increased tourism development and infrastructure works modified the topography of some areas, while urban centres expanded onto surrounding fields and up hillsides. As with many places of conflict, this demonstrates the need for post-conflict landscapes to move on physically and psychologically (e.g. Moshenska 2009), and that the timing of such research is a critical determinant of quantity and quality of results. That is not to say that investigations in the archaeology of modern conflict should only be limited to tangible remains as valuable insights can be explored via intangible aspects of Cold War materiality (Hanson 2016: 16).

Approaching MSBs using a modern conflict archaeological approach can contribute towards a fuller and more nuanced comprehension of the object through their embodied relationships with people. Primarily how they have been perceived in the past and present by those who experienced their use and disuse in the context of Cold War Albania. This research follows works which demonstrate how an interdisciplinary approach to a single iconic object, or series of monumental structures, can draw out hitherto unrealised materialities.

Baker’s Berlin Wall (1993), Buchli’s Moscow Narkomfin Communal House (1999), McWilliams’s Iron Curtain archaeology (2013), and Virilio’s Atlantic Wall bunkers (1994) have all successfully achieved this. Three of these works examine linear boundaries created as tangible or intangible walls of observational defence. The concept of walls within the globalised
context of the twenty-first century has been explored by McAtackney and McGuire (2020), who questioned the increased construction of these barriers of control. They have taken a diverse approach to what constitutes a wall or fence, but all have a political or ideological purpose (McGuire and McAtackney 2020: 3).

Cold War bunker works (Bennett 2011, 2013 2017; Beck 2011) have examined the secret internal and external natures of these brutalist structures and the fascination held by a range of professionals undertaking research as well as the public. Bennett argues that the bunker is more than simply a symbol of superpowers past, as they have material properties that demand attention (Bennett 2017: 6). Both Bennet and Beck cite Virilio’s ‘Bunker Archaeology’ (1994) and his methodology for personifying these concrete forms. Beck promotes the ambivalence of the bunker within the confines of modernism, by arguing that they cannot be assimilated into the present (Beck 2011: 98), whereas Bennet argues that the multivalence and depth of engagement afforded towards these structures is what enables them to be assimilated into modern culture (Bennett 2013: 505). Despite their differences, both agree that the power of the bunker means that where they remain, they have the potential to be re-purposed as ready-made tourist attractions (Beck 2011: 98) using their draw for a subterranean nostalgia towards the past (Bennett 2013: 509).

The recent, and for some traumatic, nature of Albania’s communist history means that a careful approach was needed so that oral histories could be objectively analysed (see Methodology below). It was also crucial that interpretative motivations did not dominate above the responsibility to collect personal and collective memories (Schofield 2004: 203). When approaching warfare monuments within the realm of living memory, any emotional ties of people should always be considered. Schofield et al (2002a) have highlighted several powerful issues that warrant careful deliberation when investigating materialities of the Cold War. Within the context of Albania, these have been summarised: How do Albanians of all ages feel about their troubled past? What is the reaction of former military personnel or civilians involved in the bunkerisation programme? How do people feel about MSBs in tourism? and how do Albanians who experienced trauma under communism and Hoxha, feel about a ‘heritage that hurts’? (Schofield et al 2002b: 1). These questions and others will be addressed in case study chapters 4 and 5 with information derived from my research and interviews.
Wider Theoretical Literature Review

Sensoriality and Embodied Relations

The ways that we use our senses and how we understand the sensory world is shaped by culture. Perception is informed by the personal meaning a specific sensation has for the individual and by the social values that it carries (Howes and Classen 2014: 1). This illustrates the importance of applying an intersensorial dimension, which has become an integral line of enquiry within material culture theory (Howes 2006: 161), and can be applied towards MSBs as objects, architectures, and as local landscapes. Merleau-Ponty developed his philosophy that perception is fundamental to understanding and engaging with the world. He argued that this body-subject concept was a mutually correlated phenomenon where the mind and human body is one unit, dependent on the senses as the world does not come ready made (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Tilley has taken Merleau-Ponty’s perception and bodily point of view forward through his studies of landscape phenomenology and states:

It is through this body that I find my way into and out of places and landscapes, experiences and understand them. Here and there, near and far, up and down, back and front, left and right constitute the most intimate link between my body and the world (Tilley 2004: 9; see also Tilley 1994).

The use of sight as the primary mechanism by which Western landscapes are experienced has been highlighted by Bender who has argued that sight is an ego-centric perspective, meaning we are the point from which any ‘seeing’ occurs (Bender 1993: 1). Visualism is deeply rooted in the European concept of landscape (Cosgrove 1998: 9), but to Howes, no matter how prominent or engrossing a single strand of perception may appear it is remains knotted into the fibres of our multisensory experience (Howes 2005: 12). This is true as within any visual primacy of landscape elements it is impossible to ignore significant feelings associated with smells, sounds, textures, tastes, and atmosphere. These can be conjured up by mental images and constructs generated through memories of actual experiences or through secondary perception or the transformation of received images (Darvill 1999: 107).
Embodied landscape work using all the senses has been driven though a phenomenological approach by Bender to reveal multiple empowerment and domination narratives of place (Bender 2006: 305). To generate the true perception of a place or landscape requires the whole living body to feel daily sensorial engagements. These must be combined with lived material practice and intimate personal and historical knowledge of a locale to experience the actuality of a place (Tilley 2004: 221). These are applicable to many of Albania’s communist landscapes, but particularly those of MSBs as an industrial form of architecture created to communicate Hoxha’s authoritarian ideologies (see Chapter 4 SV comments).

Buildings can allow, define, and regulate visual, aural, olfactory, kinaesthetic and synaesthetic effects to create distinctive sensory engagement with objects, bodies, and spaces (Hamilakis 2013: 201). This is demonstrated by Edensor’s work on industrial ruins which illustrates how the process of decay transforms an abandoned factory from a familiar ordered social space into an otherworldly (un-human) mass that causes an offensive assault on the senses (Edensor 2005a; 2005b). Cold War architectural relics, such as MSBs, tend to contain unusual smells, sounds, and include visual micro and macro elements that invite touch and demand a visceral human engagement (Edensor 2005b: 325–326).

Non-human agencies have been examined as an approach to abandoned ruins and their contents by DeSilvey, who proposed an ecology of memory, a fluid narrative which reflects the shifting condition of decaying artefacts (DeSilvey 2006: 336). In such a manner, the animals, plants, and microorganisms which operate on the fringes of human intervention can be integrated into the social lives of Cold War structures which are no longer the ‘sanitised’ spaces of the past or indeed of contemporary heritage. The concept of modernity in ruins as a ‘becoming heritage’ form is explored by Pétursdóttir in examinations of Iceland’s industrial past. These remains are nationally ignored as messy unauthentic (non-Viking) heritage, but provocatively bear witness to memory and are strangely comforting within local contexts (Pétursdóttir 2013: 45). In these ways this thesis intended to capture the agency of MSBs towards Albanians across time via perceived notions of these structures.

Buchli has suggested that buildings make people (Buchli 2013: 1), and questions how the materiality of built forms can impact on people and society (ibid.: 2). The visuality of architecture can trigger agency towards people and activate diverse memories:
The built environment is merely a prompt, a corporeal reminder of the events involved in its construction, use and destruction. The meanings and memories we bring to the stones are created by human agency and remain there. These memories are, of course, contested and they change over time. (Bevan 2006: 15–16).

The most relevant example of this within contemporary history is the architectural landscape of the former Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg. Macdonald demonstrated how social agency engaged with the visual dominance created by 1930s German National Socialists, who intended that these buildings would endure as ‘words in stone’ and speak to future generations (Macdonald 2006).

The Third Reich architect, Albert Speer, made much of the power of architectural ruins in his ‘theory of the value of ruins’. He dismissed structures built with modern techniques as being incapable of bridging tradition to create the depth of communication demanded by Hitler. It was unthinkable that piles of rusted rubble could inspire the same heroic thoughts that past monuments, such as imperial Roman architectures, were capable of doing (Virilio 1994: 56). In modern conflict investigations, Saunders terms this communicative materiality as a ‘memory bridge’. Rather than dictating any future impact, it conceptualises a softer approach whereby people’s post-war socio-economic and cultural lives are shaped by objects, ideas and attitudes formed under conflict (Saunders 2001a: 477–8). The difference lies in the immediacy of response intended or unintended by the material creator.

**Material Culture**

Personal, social, and cultural identity is embodied within persons and objectified by things, and to Tilley this objectification creates a method of understanding subject to object relations (Tilley 2006a: 61). Just as people make objects, then objects also make us (Miller 1998). The most powerful form of this is through personification or anthropomorphic relations between people and objects (Tilley 2006a: 63). This representation may either be intangibly embodied or as an overt physical representation of human features within an artefact. The intertwined disposition of this approach means that objectified conclusions are not fixed for life. Objects
are not only objectified at the point of being made, but are recontextualised during moments of consumption, perception, and transformation (Miller 1987 as cited by Tilley 2006a: 60). Within consumption, Tilley makes the point that it can replace the primary process of production as a focus for identity when an individual purchases and potentially personalises an object through choice (Tilley 2006a: 68). Whereas to Gell, consumption is the ‘reincorporation of goods and wealth into the social system that produced them in some other guise’ (Gell 1986: 112).

Appadurai has examined how commodities circulate within social lives and widens the traditional scope of what constitutes a commodity to remove constraints of previous analytical frameworks. Rather than simply being objects produced for sale, he argues that commodities should include those bartered, exchanged or which hold social potential for past, present, or future exchange (Appadurai 1986: 13). This highlights that any object has the potential to become a commodity, even if it is not so at present, which creates potent socio-political social lives (ibid.: 57). The relevance of such ideas for MSBs within modern tourism is clear and will be explored later.

Kopytoff’s cultural biographies are equally as political through cultural processes and the potential exchange value of commodities in a transformation that can be repeated multiple times (Kopytoff 1986: 65). For portable and non-portable objects, such as MSBs, this can modify their social identity and potentially create a perception conflict. From these, object biographies can be constructed to interrogate meaning and examine what agency is held. Following this, Gosden and Marshall used the principle that change is the driving force to build chapters onto the stories of people and objects. In moving away from a function-only exploration of objects, they examined objects as integral to human action by facilitating concepts of production, exchange, and consumption (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 169).

Gell equates objects to people and considers that it is important to blur the line between the two as they are both social agents and what each does is in relation to the other (Gell 1998: 7). From this Gell created the idea of objects, equivalent to persons, as primary and secondary agents. The former demonstrates an intent, for which they are morally responsible, and puts the latter to use as a mechanism to spread their agency through distributed personhood (ibid.: 20–1). Hoskins illustrates this object agency in her work on object biographies which shows how artefacts can be utilised as communication tools to gain insights.
into societal histories as well as object values and perceptions. They can also enable temporal complexities to be navigated as person and object journey through life as a reflection of each other (Hoskins 1998: 2+8, also 2006). This acknowledgement and bringing together of complementary theoretical perspectives have been insightful and a powerful tool in investigating Albania’s MSBs.

Mytum views archaeological biographies as the creation of snippets of information for events, places, and associations of the past, rather than a whole life history of an object because we can only follow what data is available (2010: 242). Of note within this thesis are discussions on how artefact biographies can be applied to multiple but generically formed objects which would work well with industrially produced MSBs. Object meanings can be explored by examining their varied nature of being: ‘manufactured, distributed, used, re-used, and discarded, together with their changing social and cultural roles and significance in these varied contexts’ (Mytum 2010: 243). For whole or partial landscapes, it is possible to create spatial or temporal biographies which reflect a time, space, or event. However, these become disrupted through any modernisation for societal progression which can affect how people interact with their environment. This could potentially lead to ruptures in their cultural biographies caused by the truncation and impoverishment of their living embodiment of memory (Knapp and Ashmore 1999: 10).

Objects carry biographies infused with sensorial dimensions that may be long, such as a family heirloom passed down through many generations (e.g. Lillios 1999), or short through those fleeting items of a fickle desire, collected and discarded like conkers in the schoolyard (e.g. Moshenska 2019). Gell terms these as ‘culture-specific aesthetics’ and ‘period-specific aesthetics’ and that to appreciate certain artworks or objects, we need to recapture the original ‘way of seeing’ (Gell 1998: 2). This enables artefact biography construction to go beyond the practicalities of functional object characteristics to draw out emotive or poignant stories.

This is the case with objects of conflict such as First World War artefacts investigated by Saunders for whom this material culture has a unique intensity (Saunders 2005: 78). This category of artefacts is ‘endlessly ambiguous and varied, despite their often apparently straightforward nature in military terms’ (ibid.). The addition of memory within conflict objects means they tend to have a value beyond the financial, and as such are retained with their
biographies told and retold over generations. Conflict items illustrate the extent and depth of potential for object biographies, which means that no single theory exists that could cover all examples or contexts (Gosden and Marshall 1999: 172).

Much of the subject-to-object approach outlined above has been criticised for being too reliant on humans rather than things themselves (Olsen 2003; González-Ruibal 2006). This is perceived as creating asymmetrical relationships which require a more symmetrical archaeology to remove an ontological distinction of our own making (Witmore 2007). This has left objects at the mercy of interpretation, rather than speaking for themselves and without a ‘first and foremost concern with things’ (Olsen 2010: 2). Whilst I do not necessarily disagree with these perspectives, particularly Appadurai’s implication that objects appear to lack importance for enquiry until they are designated by people as a commodity for exchange (Appadurai 1986). In the case of this thesis, I was faced with an abundance of people and ‘samey’ objects across the landscape, both of which are ‘important for what they are and the role they play’ (McWilliams 2013: 190) and it was their quotidian stories that I wanted to draw out.

This Albanian landscape was not of my own land nor developed from a history I had experienced; therefore, I attempted to perceive the way people and MSBs fed into each other with objectivity. For this I used my field archaeological experience, without any physical digging, and considered both people and objects as my ‘assemblage’ which worked alongside source material to note similarities in historical trajectories of MSBs and Albanians over the past fifty years. This holistic approach followed McWilliams’s archaeological survey of the Iron Curtain where research material was examined beyond simply what was encountered in the field. She found that documents, objects, photos, people, and accounts sometimes mixed and sometimes stood on their own and it was important to follow these paths rather than lose any individuality or force it into a larger picture (2013: 193–194).

Landscape

What constitutes landscape has been endlessly debated and depends on the viewpoint of the researcher: whether it is people who shape the landscape or the landscape that shapes the
people — across physical, metaphorical, or temporal boundaries. Daniels and Cosgrove define a landscape as a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings which can be read like a text by practitioners of human geography (Daniels and Cosgrove 1988: 1). Such deciphering is necessary as pictorial imagery cannot be interpreted as a clear representation and much post-modern symbolism is imbued with unstable, inverted, and recycled meanings (ibid.: 7). Ingold argues for a single, yet incredibly broad, definition of landscape as: ‘the landscape is the world as it is known to those who dwell therein’ (Ingold 1993: 156 as cited in Layton and Ucko 1999: 2; Ingold 2010: 62). Olwig has made the case that both definitions have become established viewpoints and are therefore equally valid (Olwig 1993: 339–40 as cited in Layton and Ucko 1999: 2).

Landscapes are also concepts. These can be moved through or engaged on social and cultural levels — enabling meaning to be configured and re-configured through adoptions made as part and parcel of the metaphorical route through that is chosen (Ruggles and Saunders 2012: 1126). Distinctions are frequently made between physical and cultural or social landscapes, but from a human perspective it could be argued that the primary way in which we should view landscapes is as social phenomena. We perceive, understand, and create the landscape around us through the filter of our social and cultural background and milieu (Evans 1981: 8; Tilley 1994: 25–26; Schama 1995: 12, as cited by Cooney 1999: 46). Therefore, all forms of landscape hold the values put upon it by the people who live in, view, and interact with it as the world in which we stand whilst taking up a point of view on our surroundings. Through this attentive involvement and the use of imagination, people can fashion ideas about landscape (Ingold 2010: 74) — the landscape becomes the ‘homeland of our thoughts’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 24, as cited by Ingold 2010: 74).

Bender stated that: ‘Landscapes refuse to be disciplined’. They are constantly in a tense process through their ability to invoke time and place or past and present. These are provoked by our dualist impositions of time-space or nature-culture, meaning their study demands interdisciplinarity (Bender 2006: 304) to comprehend their fluidity. Darvill and Tilley have has argued that constant changes at different rates mean that the same place will create different experiences of landscape at different times (Darvill 1999: 107; Tilley 2006b: 29). Bender argues for contextualisation to overcome this to comprehend how people understand and engage with their worlds depending on time, place, or historical conditions, based on that person’s
gender, age, class, or socio-economic situation (Bender 1993: 2). It is in this way that MSBs
remain active and participatory in Albania and are thereby socially constituted in the
landscapes of memory. Through the perception and use of MSBs by different generations of
Albanians over time have created both tangible and intangible layers of landscape.

This variation in ways of seeing landscape can involve either the physical environment
or a representation, such as a painting (Layton and Ucko 1999:1), or something more
intangible. Basso’s work on Western Cibecue Apache placenames in Arizona demonstrates the
diversity of meaning attached to places through naming. History and folklore narratives are
embedded within physical features of the Cibecue territories, named by their ancestors and
considered direct quotes from the past each time they are spoken. This intertwines individual
and collective identities between past and present members of the Cibecue, who talked to
Basso about being ‘stalked’ by the land’ (Basso 1984, 1988, 1996).

In Western scenarios, the cultural perception of a place can be a continuation of
meaning or a ‘hangover’ from earlier generations, which is particularly valid within local and/or
historical communities (Darvill 1999: 107). These ideas have resonance in Albania, as most of
the built environment was constructed under communism by workers who have often
remained in the locale meaning their families and friends know who built or produced materials
for various structures and projects. This intimate local knowledge element of communism
continued after the fall and was experienced on my visits to Albania, where Ksamil residents
called shops by the owner’s name, but no sign was present outside to signify this.

The benefits of a contemporary archaeological approach to landscape can facilitate an
examination of the effect that places have on the way we think and act (Tilley 2006b: 18).
Places of the recent past can also contribute to landscape debates over ideology, power,
resistance, meaning and experience (Jolivette 2009: 2), an essential element when considering
the physical reminders of communism in Albania. It is possible to analyse the past and present
relations of people and landscape through living memory to see what interrelations and
connections exist. These can be further interrogated through phenomenology and identity to
produce landscape biographies. This is particularly appropriate where the additional
complexity of having a material record can provide further layers of knowledge and experience
(Harrison and Schofield 2010: 247).

Critical archaeologies of landscape have highlighted access issues of control over
places, resources, people, and goods. For example, the 1950s idea of England’s ‘green and pleasant land’ was (re)constructed and propagated to serve nostalgia and propaganda against national, racial and gender identities (Jolivette 2009: 2). Jolivette cites the Marxist critic John Berger, who wrote how ‘landscapes can be deceptive’ as they can act as a curtain behind which the conflicts and aspirations of its inhabitants take place (ibid.). In this way Albania’s outwardly defensive landscape of MSBs can be viewed as shielding the internal naivety and anxieties of people’s daily lives.

**Communist Albania Literature**

Much of the communist literature produced in Albania is perhaps understandably predisposed to offering a nationalist perspective and leans heavily towards the official ideology. Sources for the domestic market take the form of political speech pamphlets, historical books, the works of Enver Hoxha, and photo journals to celebrate State anniversaries. Despite the propaganda angle, those which contain images are useful in adding visual character to comprehend the period. Some communist-era books were published in multiple languages and were designed to spread the story of Albania beyond her borders and demonstrate the ‘brilliant example of Socialist Albania’ to the world (Anon 1982a: 526). These contain historical and geographical information but also emphasise how the communist leadership harnessed nature to modernise the country and progress the people.

Publications such as these are framed within ideological narratives which cite the leading role of the Communist Party and how these works benefit the proletariat (e.g. Frasheri 1964; Anon 1982b). Similarly, English language magazines such as *New Albania* and *Albania Today* have been invaluable for information and images concerning daily-life. They are particularly useful where they deal with industrial or landscaping works, illustrate living standards and Albania’s attitudes to other countries during the late Chinese partnership period and into the succeeding isolation period that is the focus of this thesis.

Albanian-authored literature published abroad covers Albania’s communist period and geo-political position in more objective terms (e.g. Biberaj 1990; Logoreci 1977; Marmullaku 1975; Pollo and Puto 1981; Prifti 1978). Some of these works were produced in collaboration
with the authorities in Tiranë, therefore they do not fully detail Albania’s communist militarisation. MSBs are not covered by communist era literature as they were supposed to be a secret, albeit not an easy one to keep. In this way they can be considered as example of the archaeology of immateriality, visually present in the landscape but psychologically controlled as absent (Buchli 2010, 2016; Meyer 2012). Military training, the People’s Army, weapons, and defensive capabilities were photographed within propagandic stories, but no MSBs were presented or discussed. These structures are conspicuous by their absence, leading one to assume that it was an order from Hoxha that these should be omitted from communist propaganda.

Thus, a landscape had been created that was known to all and lived in by all but was strangely absent in official media – invisible in plain view, therefore. This was not the case for neighbouring countries. In 1981, the Yugoslavian State news agency questioned why Hoxha felt the need to create a siege within his own country and surround Albania with bunkers when they were not under any apparent threat. This followed the 1980 death of Hoxha’s long-time foe Josip Broz Tito, and the authors suggested it was obvious that Hoxha needed this bunker siege and his psychological war against Yugoslav revisionism to maintain his dictatorial power (Babić et al 1981: 6). The bunkerisation of Albania was illustrated using five photos of bunkers in urban and rural contexts and overtly stressed on the book cover by an MSB superimposed over a national map (Figure 4).

Albania’s wariness of being watched was not a paranoid delusion, as attested by the level of detail contained within CIA documents produced in co-operation with British and other Western intelligence organisations. Many of these monthly reports have now been declassified with redacted versions available online and have been an excellent resource for researching Albania’s communist period from the ‘imperialist’ side. For example, in February 1976, the CIA reported that the normally secretive Albanians were openly building bomb shelters and anti-aircraft bunkers around Tiranë. This information came from Italian and French ambassadors who felt that the ever-present xenophobia in the capital had been raised to an all-time high through propaganda and a tightening of ideological controls. They communicated that Albania was busy building a chain of bunkers along the Adriatic coast, an action described as ‘frenzied’ (CIA 1976: 7).
Similarly, archives of The Economist magazine cover the political course of Albania’s communist period within a global context but were also privy to domestic documentation. In 1976, a report on Albania’s new communist constitution detailed how defending the homeland was the supreme duty and greatest honour for all Albanians and how it was explicitly prohibited for any Albanian to accept the surrender or occupation of the country. They also quoted Hoxha in the wake of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, when he told a party newspaper: ‘Experience has taught us to be vigilant and prepared: we are dancing in the wolf’s mouth’ (Anon 1976: 52).

Concerning Albania’s partnership with China, contemporary literature produced by Griffith (1963) and Hamm (1963) focus on the initial development of this relationship. Prifti
wrote that Hoxha’s 1967 Ideological and Cultural Revolution was a copy of Mao’s Cultural Revolution. This shift, Prifti described was one for the people, whereby religion and military ranks were abolished as: ‘important revolutionary measures, designed to place proletarian politics above all other things’ (Prifti 1978: 207). Later works by Blumi (1999: 306), Mëhilli (2017) and Marku (2017) have discussed how Albania’s Ideological and Cultural Revolution was not a direct reproduction of China’s, as ideas collided rather than were developed in unison.

Hoxha initially did not support China’s plans and: ‘at times, the paranoia of Mao’s Cultural Revolution seemed baffling even to the paranoid Stalinists in Tirana’ (Mëhilli 2017: 220). The benefits to Albania of their eventual support presented an opportunity for Hoxha to increase financial aid for the country’s economy and defence (Marku 2017: 368). This additional money and material aid went towards planning and implementing a national defence which centred around the bunkerisation of Albania and creation of a People’s Army to fight using the apparatus of MSBs across the landscape.

Albanian travelogue literature written while the bunkerisation process was underway was produced by Bertolino (1979), Gardiner (1976) and Newby (1984), and provides insights into the interplay of tourists and Albanians under the regime. Less impartial works were created by visitors invited to Albania to see ‘real socialism in action’, such as the Marxist writer Ash (1974) who covered Albanian history and society with much optimism. Similar sentiments were crafted by Birch (1976) and Bland (1981) who visited Albania on organised tours with the UK Albanian Society. These are ideological works which were only useful in their detailed descriptions of landscape changes and to comprehend a sympathetic foreign perspective.

Publications written after the fall of the regime allow for a more unbiased view, and crucially some of these works mention Albania’s MSB programme, but only within the general context of militarisation (e.g. Biberaj 1998; Glenny 2000; Jarvis 2000; Vaughan-Whitehead 1999; Vickers 1999; Zickel and Iwaskiw 1994). Many of Hall’s publications (1993, 1994, 1999, 2001) and those of de Waal (2001, 2014) contain well researched geographical, and ethno-historical data while exploring environmental concerns through industrialisation, land ownership issues and the prospects of future tourism.

Articles and literature by George (1995), Rugg (1994) and Vickers and Pettifer (1997) discuss the financial costs of the MSB programme and the wider implications of this perceived waste of money. Most recently, Abrahams (2015) has covered Albania’s transitional political
and social changes from the death of Hoxha to 2014. He blended his own travel experiences with those of the people he met and historical documents to create an account that poignantly threads human rights and freedom issues into the story of modern Albania (e.g. ibid.: 25–27).

From an anthropological perspective Littlewood’s (2009) research examines costs other than financial within a post-communist Albanian context, primarily how a small village can develop and the implications of using memory and forgetting as a coping mechanism. This works well alongside more general works on memory studies within the recent past, such as Connerton (2009), Poole (2008) and Butler (1989). Albanian identities are explored across Ottoman to modern contexts through myths and history in an edited volume by Schwandner-Sievers and Fischer (2002). This highlighted how Albania was at the junction of transitioning from the homogenous national thought imposed by communism towards becoming infused with the processes of international developmental (Schwandner-Sievers 2002: 4). Woodcock’s (2007, 2014, 2016) ethnographic research denigrates the regime and its treatment of people in daily life, particularly women and prisoners. She compares the post-communist experiences of Albania to Romania and found that in 2003, Albanian communism remained in a present that merged with the past, unlike Romania which had moved on somewhat (ibid.: 2014: 39).

The borderlands of Albania have also been investigated using ethnographic, anthropological, and cultural geographical perspectives. Most notably, Vullnetari has used oral histories with a historical-geographical approach to examine daily lives along Albania’s communist borderlands. She found that on occasion, the strict physical and mental dominance of border architecture was challenged on a local level and life for residents was a balancing act of compliance and resistance (Vullnetari 2019: 92). King and Vullnetari examined mobilities across the transition from communist to present using oral histories to highlight an increase in societal inequality. Their research highlights how national borders were reinforced inwardly and outwardly with only a carefully selected, privileged few able to cross over it (Vullnetari and King 2014: 127).

Dalakoglou’s ethnographic study of the SH4 road, as it is now called, leading to the Albanian-Greek border crossing point is within the Drino Valley study area (see Chapter 5). He centralised this linear feature to examine people’s networks and relationships towards infrastructures of socialism from past to present (Dalakoglou 2010, 2012, 2017). This has been particularly insightful for comprehending a localised landscape under and beyond communism.
Earlier ethnological border work by Green (2005) focused primarily on the Greek side of the southern border with Albania. She explored how marginality caused people, place, and space to adapt in response to conflict and politics of the twentieth century. For this research it was interesting to see the response on the Western side of this closed border and how this blocked landscape impacted on people’s lives.

Hoxha and the leadership reworked and utilised history, material culture and entire landscapes to dramatically stamp their ideological vision on Albania (Galaty et al 2009: 172). The all-encompassing role of Hoxha is a critical factor to consider in assessing any aspect of Albania’s communist history, but particularly within the role of defending the homeland, an aspect he also used to legitimise his own power (see Chapter 3). Detailed accounts of Hoxha’s life, his influences, and his dictatorial approach have been published by Halliday (1986), O’Donnell (1999), and most recently by Fevziu (2016). As with many dictators, it is difficult to objectively assess his position during that time, yet he is impossible to ignore or fully demonise due to the role he played in maintaining modern Albania’s independence (Standish 2002: 124).

The position of dictators and their use of nationalism and ideologies in the process of creating and maintaining a totalitarian dictatorship have been previously investigated by Galaty and Watkinson (2004a), Kane (2003) and Meskell (1998).

Galaty and Watkinson examined the importance Hoxha placed on the advancement of archaeology during the communist era. Hoxha realised the importance of Albania’s past and used it to acquire legitimacy through the construction of a nationalist ideology which built and reinforced unity amongst Albanians (Galaty and Watkinson 2004b: 3). Through the creation of a massively fortified bunker landscape Hoxha and the leadership created a material representation of the totalitarian State system which reached from the centre of the capital to the borderlands. In the same way that Hitler intended Nazi architecture to ‘speak as eternal witnesses’ to future generations (Macdonald 2006: 112), Hoxha planned and implemented an MSB directive in Albania’s landscape which has spoken and continues to converse with the population. Hoxha’s concern with the use of archaeology, to define identity and sustain a unified Albanian mentality has been ironically reflected by his creation of a material culture which has formed the most visible and enduring feature of a modern conflict archaeology in Albania.
Albanian Bunkers

The first work to consider the MSB within an archaeological framework was Galaty et al (1999). An MSB was examined as a material symbol of dominance employed by the Albanian dictatorship and compared this to its treatment within a post-communist landscape. They followed this with an anthropological examination of MSBs within the context of memory and the collective impact of trauma (Galaty et al 2009). They argued that the unique Cold War path taken by Albania was rooted in the country’s long history of trauma created by repeated invasion and occupation. As a reaction against this, the Albanian population looked to Hoxha’s leadership as a means of future protection. Galaty et al considered that the material symbolism of MSBs embody and communicate a history deep with trauma, amongst other human emotions, that can be written into the fabric of an archaeological landscape (Galaty et al 2009: 172). It was Enver Hoxha and the leadership who reworked and utilised history, material culture and landscapes to dramatically impose their ideology on Albania (ibid.).

Since the late 2000s, there has been a steady increase in literature that examines the communist military legacy of Albania. This includes my 2008 MA thesis which investigated the materialities and mentalities of Albania’s communist bunkers, with a focus on MSBs (Glass 2008). This was based primarily on my Ksamil experiences while on excavations at Butrint with additional fieldwork for the MA conducted further north along the coast. Aspects of MSB communist and post-communist re-uses were investigated to draw out elements of symbolism, present meanings, identity, and what potential there was to create bunker biographies.

In addition, my MA addressed contemporary issues of piecemeal MSB destruction through the modernisation of Albania and considered that with such an uncertain future, the time to examine bunkers was now (ibid.: 63). One conclusion stated the ‘potential for the bunker to become an unofficial tourist marker and materialise as a reluctant socio-cultural symbol of Albania’ (ibid.: 65), which is an aspect explored later within this thesis. Overall, this MA created a snapshot of the attitudes and treatment of MSBs by Albanians and foreigners three years prior to the larger scale destruction of 2011–2013. Some of this work has been further developed and incorporated into this thesis (with interviewees anonymised — see Ethics below).
Much other literature on Albania’s bunkers tends towards examining their architectural form, with a focus on their repurposing or treatment within post-communist societal memories. The main example of this has been the Concrete Mushrooms project instigated by Stefa and Mydyti as part of their 2008 Landscape Architecture MA in Milan (Stefa and Mydyti 2012). They aimed to raise awareness and revitalise Albania’s mushroom-shaped bunkers by repurposing them for the twenty-first century (ibid.: 16). It was proposed that all bunker types could potentially be re-engaged with a minimal, yet sustainable, level of conversion which would benefit locals and tourists alike.

Their designs demonstrated that individual and grouped MSBs could be incorporated into camping pitches, transformed into public toilets, or utilised as kiosks (ibid.: 118). Stefa and Mydyti gave an interview to an Albanian magazine explaining that they had been inspired to choose this subject after reading an article, in the same magazine, about my MA bunker research (Anon 2012: 17; see Appendix A). This had detailed my motivations for exploring Albania’s MSB legacy using a modern conflict archaeological perspective and made the point that Cold War remnants have use value for the future within the context of communist heritage tourism (Pinderi 2008: 27–30; see Appendix B). This was followed up in 2010 by journalist Engjëll Serjani who wrote an article in 

Other works on Albanian concrete bunkers have examined such varied perspectives as communist-era legacies as heritage (Eaton and Roshi 2014; Dujisin 2007; Iacono and Këllçi, 2015; Myhrberg 2009), communist memory (Le Devehat 2020) industrial archaeology (Ayers and Parangoni 2015), military heritage (Francis 2013), and as artistic architecture with a focus on the conversion potential of Cold War military relics (Martin-McAuliffe 2018, Miho 2012; Morgan 2015; Payne 2014 and Pike 2013, 2016, 2019). Significantly, and to the best of my knowledge, none of these authors/investigators have been able to acquire or access documents regarding the specifics of the MSB programme from the Albanian Ministry of Defence or other official archives.

Even though I too was unable to gain such access (see Research Permissions and Challenges below), I consider this a problem for the accuracy of future literature, particularly as the MSB resource has diminished considerably since 2011. This is especially the case within
online blogs, journalism, and travel writing, which are well-read sources in our digital age. These non-academic works tend to repeat unchecked data or myths with a superficial focus on the number of MSBs created by a crazy dictator who was ‘bonkers for bunkers’ (Mitchell 2013) and display little theoretical consideration of these objects. This supports McWilliams’s assertion that those who undertake research as ‘hasty sightseers’ reproduce narratives which already exist (2013: 214), which precisely highlights the style of bunker investigations that this thesis intended to move beyond.

The increase of popular writing about Albanian bunkers is likely symptomatic of a growing comprehension of a country that, up until recently, many people would struggle to find on a map. This understanding has been aided by the inclusion of Albania’s bunker landscapes within popular UK travel television and radio programmes, most notably:

- Michael Palin’s New Europe, 2007 — likened Durrës coastline MSBs to giant jellyfish.
- Joanna Lumley’s Silk Road Adventure, 2018 — discussed MSBs along the Via Egnatia.
- Rick Stein’s From Venice to Istanbul, 2015 — MSBs featured between his travels around Albania to cook traditional dishes.
- The Misadventures of Romesh Ranganathan: Albania, 2018 — Romesh noted MSBs and got an Albanian eagle tattoo in a PZ bunker studio.
- Bethany Hughes’s Ancient Ways 2015 BBC Radio 4 — the Via Egnatia, included an exploration of Albanian MSBs and PZ bunkers as ‘curious constructions’ of Hoxha.

The inclusion of Albania’s bunkerisation by a paranoid dictator within such mainstream UK media, particularly where the main programme focus is on earlier periods of history, further reinforce the perception of the country as an exotic relic of the Cold War.

MSBs are only one of many socialist legacies that remain visually extant within the urban and rural psyche of modern Albania. Kalo (2019) has explored where these legacies sit within the new generation of Albanians through their use by art, artists and within ‘nostalgic’ enterprises such as communist cafés, where the past has been recommodified for the present (ibid.: 53). Similar work by Isto illustrates how communist heritage tourism has created an industry out of Albania’s cultural and collective memory through Tiranë’s Bunk’Art 1, opened in 2014, and Bunk’Art 2, opened in 2016.
The former was housed in an atomic bunker for the Party elite, including Hoxha, and was converted into a museum and art space which Isto has criticised as facilitating a dependent dynamic between memory and touristic expectations (Isto 2017: 3). Bunk’Art 2 is a converted underground bunker museum in the city centre dedicated to victims of communism (ibid.: 7). In addition, Isto has examined communist monuments and statues, known locally as Lapidars, and explored how these have been renegotiated through contemporary politics with the addition of newer commemorative architectures (Isto 2016, 2019).

From 2014 the Lapidars of Albania were documented by a non-governmental collective called the Department of Eagles who created the first overview of Albanian monumentality that spanned the entire communist period. The Albanian Lapidar Survey created a gazetteer, condition report and photographic snapshot, published as a three-volume series (van Gerven Oei, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c). The installation of memorials across Albania was a far more visual and artistic approach to landscape domination than the MSB scheme, but both are communicative tools from the leadership. MSBs and Lapidars are linked in message, that their increased numbers followed Albania’s Ideological and Cultural Revolution and neither have been offered legal heritage protection (ibid.: 2015a: 17–18). Bickert (2018: 243) views Albania’s socialist cultural landscapes as very much part of the present and concludes that these legacies play an important role in the currently developing image of the country at home and abroad. Also, as with the Lapidar Survey, Bickert calls for a necessary and overdue discussion about communist material heritage (ibid.: 218).

**Taking an Interdisciplinary Modern Conflict Archaeology Approach**

As an archaeologist with 25 years of field investigation experience, it has become an intrinsic part of my skillset to apply an archaeological approach towards sites, landscape settings, the excavation of individual or interrelated features, and objects. Questions involving methodologies for different site types, time periods, intercutting features, topographies, soil compositions and geologies have answers in experiences, built up over time as a knowledge-bank to be applied when needed. For this thesis, however, no trowel-excavation was required, and the subject was contained within the large bounded ‘trench’ of Albania.
As some of the practical fieldwork skills outlined above could not be applied in the same manner, an amended route forward was required to investigate how the Albanian MSB programme impacted the landscape and people from past to present. The path chosen was to embed this research into interdisciplinary modern conflict archaeology and heritage studies. This utilises archaeological and anthropological approaches towards conflict places, spaces, objects, and memory. It also emphasises issues of heritagisation and adopts a social archaeological approach towards people and places of the recent and remembered past. Facilitating such a diverse approach is its strength (Saunders 2012b: x); thus, the field presents a vast and complex depth of research potential with legacies and impacts that stem beyond spatial and temporal boundaries of militarised conflict.

This approach has enabled researchers to recognise, demonstrate, and comprehend the breadth of potency, provocation, and future potential that can stem from a single artefact or story up to an entire region, conflict, or country. With MSB positions located across Albania, this holistic approach combined well with my skills of archaeological recording, observation, and empirical analysis. The journey towards writing this thesis has been a long one, meaning some of the more recent interdisciplinary approaches to modern conflict (see below) were published along the way. These were used to enhance my methodological comprehension and provide insight towards approaching the scale and physicality of Albania’s MSB landscape while sensitively exploring people’s memories and attitudes.

These works contain innovative ideas and approaches to explore sites, landscapes, objects, heritage, commemoration, and memorialisation with consideration towards creating a more public or community led discourse. Research on seemingly well-known sites or conflicts have drawn out fresh perspectives and understanding when investigations are led by material culture intertwined with local memory or opinion. Historical texts become a secondary source and it is the everyday people, events and stories that are used to create insight and break down the complexities of conflict. These methods were used by: McWilliams (2013) and by Vařeka and Symonds (2020) along the Iron Curtain, by González-Ruibal (2019) in his explorations into the materialities of Supermodernity, by Theune (2018) in her overview of (mostly) European twentieth century conflicts and for Second World War landscapes in Moshenska’s (2009) London, De Nardi’s (2017) Italy and Seitsonen’s (2017) Finnish Lapland.

Moving away from traditionally better known places and spaces of conflict can prove
ground-breaking, particularly where an abundance of understudied material is present that allows the researcher to forge multiple routes of examination. Breithoff’s (2020) examination of the Chaco War in Paraguay presented the first archaeological-anthropological investigation into the materiality of this conflict. In addition to assessing traditional artefacts and sites of war, biophysical features of the harsh landscape proved fundamental in comprehending the human or soldier experience (Breithoff 2020: 68). Like many of Albania’s MSB landscapes, bushland areas that were once scarred by the Chaco War are now being reclaimed by natural forces, robbed for reuse, and decaying with sunken features such as trench lines slowly infilling (ibid.: 121). In heritage terms, Chaco sites also present similar questions regarding national comprehension, regulation, and responsibility for legacies of conflict through varied levels of curation and neglect (ibid.: 181).

In his study of resistance along the Sudanese-Ethiopian borderland, González-Ruibal rationalised his use of archaeology as a methodological process in, and of, the present by stating: ‘archaeology, though its focus on things, has a particular ability to look at the unsaid, at what lies beyond discourse’ (González-Ruibal 2014: 12). Communist Albania experienced a peculiar form of resistance, one that was expressed outwards against bordering countries and much of the wider world. This was a totalitarian response directed towards foreign powers, but also as an attempt to maintain domestic control through nationalism. As there are ‘different forms of being against domination’ (ibid.: 10), González-Ruibal’s concept of resistance reflected the material worlds of societies in conflict, from small subtle acts to destabilising events and the often messy particulars in between (ibid.).

González-Ruibal established that resistance methods were governed by the culture and political attitudes of those people involved but noted that historical experiences of the state were also a factor (ibid.: 330). Communist Albania’s ‘little person against the world’ attitude had been developed and reinforced over centuries through invasion and occupation (see Chapter 1). This prevailing mindset was one that Hoxha not only understood but was able to manipulate towards his fundamental goal of self-reliance within a single state. In this manner, the MSB programme, from materials, to people involvement and landscape distribution, produced a borderwide network of outward resistance that reified a national underdog mentality.

Like my own studies on communist Albania, Seitsonen’s (2017) examination of Second World War German occupied landscapes of Finnish Lapland has been undertaken over a decade
or so of fieldwork, research, local engagement, and site visits. He too found that the study material lacked official recognition or heritage protection and is perceived by many as war junk that offends the otherwise natural beauty of the landscape (Seitsonen 2017: 56). This situation mirrors the awkward status of Albania’s MSBs covered later within this thesis. After investigating conflicting views attached to the social value and historical importance of German military remains within national and local contexts, Seitsonen proposed that dialogues must recognise the perspectives of all stakeholders to create any sustainable heritage future (ibid.: 167).

Clearly there is a dark element to the ideological indoctrination and oppression used to support nationalism through the production and installation of Albania’s MSB landscape. On a global scale, these bunker sites are positioned at the lower end of the spectrum when compared to Auschwitz in Poland or Rwandan genocide sites and memorials (see www.dark-tourism.com, which awarded Albanian bunkers the lowest ‘dark rating’ of 1/10). They may not score highly or be as arresting as other sites of dark heritage, but MSBs did feed into a framework of oppression. It is possible that their relatively small size, repetitive form, and unpretentious nature is precisely why they can be utilised as an archaeological and anthropological tool to facilitate wider investigations into communist Albanian life.

The relatively recent timeframe of Moshenska’s (2009) work on Second World War civilians in Britain and De Nardi’s (2014, 2017 and 2020) research on Italian and British resistance veterans of that same conflict has enabled first-hand memories to be collated. This was a core consideration within both research strategies as the remaining resource is unfortunately one that is dwindling. Through semi-structured interviews, De Nardi combined stories and mementoes to demonstrate how the body interacts between the two through feelings that create sites of emotional memory (De Nardi 2014: 444).

De Nardi argues that these are embodied materialities that reside within the past but are drawn corporeally into the present through a visceral sensorial engagement that can regenerate stories and reframe relations with established narratives (ibid.: 460–461). This process has been termed by De Nardi as ‘autobiographical materiality’ and can trigger powerful individual memories that facilitate a deeper investigation into conflict experiences (De Nardi 2017: 33 and 2020: 448). This is precisely the kind of approach that is necessary for studies into all aspects of communist Albania, where the level of cultural amnesia (Connerton 2009: 120;
also see Chapter 6), the push for Albamodernity, and lack of archival sources continue to be an issue while time moves forward.

In conducting archaeological excavations at multiple wartime London sites, Moshenska engaged local communities and collated oral histories. These were intertwined with explorations of artefacts ranging from small shrapnel fragments to large air raid shelters and landscapes of bombing, ruin, or commemoration. The results were deeply nuanced and demonstrated how people of all ages navigated the emotional trauma of conflict experiences at home (Moshenska 2009). These findings were embedded into concepts of public archaeology, ethics, and community archaeology to create toolkits that positioned people at the centre and questioned what modern conflict archaeology could do for them? (ibid.: 128). This ground-up model connects the present to the recent past to draw out more humane and intangible aspects of history and identity to develop a sustainable route forward. For Moshenska, this is the most appropriate route whereby heritage considerations can be assessed using locally engaged support towards any commemoration or memorialisation of conflict related places (ibid.: 129).

Without access to official Albanian archives, much of the research for this thesis could only be undertaken within local communities. Put simply, a top-down research model was impossible and would not enable perspectives to be heard from those who experienced MSBs and life under communism. Much inspiration was taken from Moshenska’s holistic approach and its capacity to bridge the gap between past and present, particularly in the sensitive and open conduct of oral histories. In addition, as an understudied aspect of modern conflict archaeology, Moshenska’s examination of childhood wartime experiences proved invaluable when analysing my discussions with Ksamil’s younger generations on MSB engagement (ibid.: 174 and Moshenska 2019). It was interesting to compare similarities in the experience and mindsets of children towards conflict material culture across time and space, particularly regarding the allure of clandestine places.

With their central focus on oral history work, conflict artefacts, ethnographic interviews, and discussions, Moshenska and De Nardi have demonstrated how localised experiences can frame, comprehend, and highlight the actuality of a time and place not personally experienced by the researcher. These were of real value regarding my communist Albania research as I am unable to fully sense the bleakness, not only for those who were persecuted but for much of the population who lived each day with shortages and a curtailed level of freedom.
In developing my practical research strategy, McWilliams’s methodology for examining Iron Curtain materialities was highly informative. In part this was a result of Albania’s border forming a defensive part of this perceived East-West divisional line during the Cold War, albeit as a peculiar outlier and nationally aligned with China when the MSB concept was devised. As far as I am aware, the term Iron Curtain is not utilised within Albania regarding borderland discussions, but this could change in future to suit heritage narratives for tourism (see McWilliams 2013: 118).

Rather than studying the whole length of the Iron Curtain, McWilliams took a contemporary archaeological approach, melding archaeology with anthropology, to target three separate border case study areas. These sites highlighted differences for comparison and were explored using non-excavational methods of archaeological walkover survey, GPS recording, observation, and photography. On the ground, this was complemented by ethnographic interviews anthropological interviews and an investigation of the materials ‘left behind’ to examine their potential as heritage derived from past and present networks (ibid.: 17–20). For Albania, a similar methodology was required to approach MSBs, their settings and people who had engaged with these structures. In addition, the selective case study approach was necessary as the density of MSBs nationwide meant the time required to cover and analyse installations across the whole country was just not feasible.

The time frames of border infrastructure construction, maintenance, and distance since the close of the Cold War within McWilliam’s fieldwork is also comparable with Albania. This enabled similar questions to be asked regarding the perception of cold war border infrastructure as heritage. McWilliams’s research highlighted variations in the way Iron Curtain materials are considered as landscape heritage. In some places it was established as an official part of the story and was promoted to visitors as such, whereas in other places it was either moving towards becoming heritage or may never be viewed as such (ibid.: 16). The differences in these processes can also be applied to Albania’s MSBs where treatments towards individual and groups of installations have varied depending on their location, the attitudes of people involved and the potential economic benefit.

Harrison’s (2011) contemporary archaeological concept of ‘Surface Assemblages’ was used by McWilliams (2013) and Breithoff (2020) to construct their methodologies and has relevance to the approach taken in this thesis. This idea presents an alternative to archaeology-
as-excavation in the form of archaeology-as-surface-survey with a process of assembling and reassembling. Harrison argues that this would enable a shift towards the development of ‘a viable archaeology in and of the present’, a creative engagement that centralises the now and future possibilities, leaving the past as providing secondary context only when such considerations are required (Harrison 2011: 144).

The physical Albanian landscape of MSBs is a networked surface assemblage which can be considered, as Harrison puts it, ‘a metaphor for an unconstituted present, a space in which the past, present and future are combined and are still in the process of becoming’ (ibid.: 154). As elements of a former heavily militarised landscape, MSBs are now situated across a multi-layered present within an Albania that is seemingly still transitioning, thirty years after the fall of communism. The physical and mental impacts of these conflicting landscapes have created an MSB agency entrenched in the past but is also of the present with social-life trajectories and differing levels of engagement (including ambivalence) creatively remaining in process.

Using a research scope that expanded beyond the place and time of the event, Theune (2018) explored twentieth and twenty-first century conflicts and argued for a wider research base. This was to include infrastructures of private and public institutions or people’s lives and their domestic living, working, leisure and religion or worship. In this manner, she envisaged how this could highlight how elements of war, violence or protest are inherently present away from any specific conflict event and feed into daily lives, future directions, and subsequent generations (Theune 2018: 22). This was framed using a contemporary archaeological approach as the author felt that other period, place, or event terms, such as ‘Archaeology of the Great War’, were too limiting to encompass the breadth and multi-layered complexity of conflict (ibid.: 22).

Interestingly it is only in Theune’s bibliography that the terms ‘Modern Conflict Archaeology’ or ‘Archaeology of Modern Conflict’ are present (ibid.: 174 and 181). As with McWilliams (2013), these terms do not seem to have been considered a catch-all with which to suitably explore recent conflicts, their impacts, and legacies. This may be because the archaeology of modern conflict has been wrongly perceived as fixed solely on the war event, soldiers or sites relating to the fighting front. As such it may have been discounted as having the required interdisciplinary scope for in-depth investigations towards people’s experiences, landscape modifications and artefactual biographies that derive from conflict in its many forms.
This assumption is one that this thesis hopes to remedy as the Albanian landscape is not one that experienced an invasion under communism and no war against foreigners was fought on its soil. Through ideologically-managed preparations, an infrastructure and conditioned people were developed to work towards an anticipated future physical conflict. The vestiges of this time present a significant archaeological and anthropological record for which a modern conflict archaeological approach is appropriate.

Despite terminological considerations, the interdisciplinary works outlined above are at the cutting edge of current research into modern conflict archaeology and heritage. They have been greatly influenced by the works of Saunders, with his approach to First World War Trench Art, and Schofield, whose work on military legacies, contested places and engagement has widened the perception of what constitutes heritage. Saunders’s Trench Art research expanded the concept of conflict material culture beyond the battlefield into homes and integrated memory, the senses and landscape to examine production and experiential practices that shifted from local to global conflicts (see Saunders 2003a, 2003b, 2007).

From 2007, Saunders’s anthropological and archaeological approach to twentieth-century conflicts was utilised within teaching at the University of Bristol as a key element of two MA courses, where I engaged as a student. Saunders has stated that his students were not motivated by traditional aspects of military history (2012a: viii), such as weighty historical tomes, warfare planning tactics or the minutiae of army movements on the battlefield. This is true, it was precisely the idea that a ‘bullets and buttons’ knowledge was not necessarily required to investigate, comprehend, or have a voice on the wider impact of conflict upon people, objects and places that was the attraction.

The interdisciplinary nature of modern conflict archaeology perceives objects and landscapes as ‘complexly embedded and inter-connected materialisations of the human experience’ (Saunders 2012b: xii). For this researcher, such an approach has enabled a holistic overarching conceptual framework to be forged with possibilities for determining a particular methodology without constraints. This is liberating and facilitates an engaged individual approach which can bring new dimensions and intellectual perspectives into well-studied and lesser-known conflicts from their occurrence through to impacts in the present.

As editors of the Routledge Material Culture and Modern Conflict book series, Saunders and Cornish have worked towards a re-appraisal of material legacies from recent conflicts across
the globe. In their series introduction, they explain how the material culture of modern conflict is a richly diverse field with seemingly endless potential for study. Research can range from small, single item or type of artefact through to buildings and entire landscapes which are linked by way of being the product of human processes and transformation under the psychological pressure created by actual warfare or the threat of conflict. The engagement of different disciplines and overlapping their commonalities enables the complexities of modern conflict to be drawn out and create new intellectually driven hybridised approaches (e.g. see preface in De Nardi 2017). Albanian MSBs seemed to demand this interdisciplinary method and conceptual approach to comprehend their materiality, history, and relevance in past and modern Albania.

The work of Schofield on modern conflict archaeology has been seminal regarding approach, methods, and engagement. While with English Heritage (now Historic England) he established policy, practice, and pioneered designation for recent military heritage in the UK (see Schofield 1998). This led to a fundamental change in perception towards twentieth-century military legacies and their being viewed as an acceptable, and marketable, heritage for the future. Subsequent research by Schofield has drawn on archaeological theory and practice to intertwine landscapes, objects, and sites of recent conflict with explorations of what can constitute heritage. Of relevance for this thesis is his work on European places and spaces of the Cold War and the examination of physical and mental scars remaining beyond any battle or international ‘war of words’ events (see Schofield 2005, Schofield et al 2002a; Schofield and Cocroft 2007).

Schofield’s wider work combines contested sites and militarised locations with memory, artistic and social aspects to examine how, as heritage, these places can be managed in consultation with local people and stakeholders to create a sustainable sense of belonging and ownership (see Schofield 2009). These values are at the core of his most recent publication, with Cocroft and Dobronovskaya, which puts forward an approach to Cold War heritage that comprises East and West as a transnational landscape with shared experiences, rather than multiple bordered and separate regions. They argue that this ‘offers a more holistic, symmetrical, humane, democratic and intellectually rewarding way to address a heritage of the recent and remembered past’ (Schofield et al 2021: 40). The characterisation or management of Cold War legacies is yet to occur on a national level in Albania, but small-scale initiatives have
seen bunkers utilised for recycling projects, artwork and music which have empowered ground-up decision making and created impact on a local level.

As demonstrated above, the field of interdisciplinary modern conflict archaeology and heritage research is enticing, dynamic, diverse, and often controversial on practical and theoretical levels. This literature overview is not simply representative of an interesting and provocative body of current works that comprise the intricacies of people, places, and spaces of recent conflicts. These are cutting edge and innovative with a sharp and often darkly social relevance that illustrate the sustained impact conflict can have upon people’s lives today. In many cases the heritage dimension and cultural biographies of these sites are constantly developing, being contested, and renegotiated. As time moves on, land is redeveloped, generations with lived-experiences pass away, objects are lost or sold for profit, and concepts of local and global scales of heritage shift as political and economic priorities waver.

This thesis has taken methodological inspiration from the above works to create an important contribution to studies of modern conflict archaeology using practical and theoretical engagements. The material worlds of Albanians and MSBs were explored and assessed over two study areas to develop the first typology that could suitably categorise, quantify, and interrogate the resource. This interdisciplinary approach towards investigating the forceful mechanics of communist MSBs as a national physical and psychological defence, along with multi-scalar experiences of people involved on different levels, has enabled this thesis to shed new insight into acceptances and deviations of landscape militarisation. The full details of my methodological scope, permissions and challenges are set out below.

Methodology

The process of doing contemporary and modern conflict archaeology across the current Albanian landscape takes in elements of the communist past situated within the present alongside modern developments. Drab grey and colourful painted communist concrete buildings are juxtaposed with newer, taller structures, wider roads and businesses containing Western goods. This displays the story of a transitioning landscape that requires no digging to investigate. The rich availability of materials pertaining to communist landscape militarisation
remains present, despite recent developments, urbanisation expansion and deliberate
destruc
tions.

In 2005 I made enquiries in Albania about the potential appetite for exploring and
researching legacies of socialism extant in the landscape as I had noticed an increased pace of
redevelopment and change since 2001. I discussed this with an Albanian senior heritage and
conservation professional who explained that while people may not understand why I was
looking archaeologically at such things, there was more of a willingness to talk about
communism than had existed a few years earlier.

The period spanning the research for this thesis has been an interesting juncture for
MSBs in Albania. After a period of post-communist ambivalence, with piecemeal breaking prior
to the destructions of 2011–2013, an increased interest in the communist period has arisen
that is not yet full-blown nostalgia. Progression and modernisation have mellowed attitudes
towards the Cold War period and the country has been relatively stable for the past 20 years.
However, there are still serious issues regarding the past that need to be considered, particularly
when dealing with people who suffered under the regime, political prisoners, camps, and
religious persecution.

The relatively recent timeframe of my research agenda means it is inevitable that first
and second-hand memories would be encountered. These are a key resource which cannot be
ignored, particularly where written records are scarce, biased, or unavailable, but are also
ethically hazardous (Moshenska 2008a: 164). As mentioned in Chapter 1, life for many people in
communist Albania was traumatic, stressful, and life-changing on multiple levels. The strongest
tangible legacies of that time are prison camps, exiled villages, forced labour works such as
mines, and execution or mass burial sites. It was not my intention to visit any of these places or
seek out persecuted persons or former prisoners, but there was always the possibility that I
might unknowingly interview somebody who had suffered but who had not disclosed the fact
prior to our formal discussions.

The research for this study and methodology for data collection, field survey and
ethnographic interviews has been respectful and considered in approach with due diligence. It
was undertaken in accordance with research permission from the Institute of Archaeology in
Tiranë, ethical approval from the University of Bristol (see below) and my own personal moral
code. The main points of this system were the participant’s ability to choose what to disclose
and that they could end the interview at any time. On the reverse side I followed Moshenska in being wary of emotional responses and considered the well-being of interviewees as my responsibility (2008a: 165); I was fully prepared to conclude any discussion if distress was evident. No interviewees disclosed that they had suffered persecution or imprisonment under the regime, but the issue of people’s wider relatives having bad biographies did arise and will be referred to in the context of Albania’s bunkerisation.

The only excavation that has occurred for this research is metaphorical with extensive walkover visual surveys, analysis and ethnographic interviews conducted within both case study areas. Fieldwork and interview information were supported and contextualised by Albania’s peculiar national history, but literature on localised communist developments is scarce or unobtainable. Therefore, some of the local landscape development history in this thesis, particularly for the Ksamil Peninsula, has been pooled from conversations conducted since 2001. This generalised information has not been referenced explicitly to any individual whereas observations which stem from formal interviews are referenced as such.

Desk-based research in the Tiranë archives that I was able to access yielded nothing of note regarding MSBs or defensive planning under communism. This meagre haul was supplemented by trawling web sources, particularly the archives of Albanian online newspapers, where retrospective articles on communism often included bunkers. Primary fieldwork was undertaken whilst on excavations in the country using weekends or time tacked onto the end of the digging season. As a result of more time spent there, I felt a deeper level of engagement with the MSBs, people and landscape of the Ksamil Peninsula compared to the Drino Valley. This enabled me to better comprehend the juxtaposition of different time periods across the Ksamil Peninsula landscape and see ‘all fragments from the past intermingling and reactivated in the present’ (McWilliams 2013: 193). Particularly pertinent were my explorations along the coastline over successive years, noting differences in use and treatment, until the MSBs had been reduced to rubble.

The following outlines research undertaken in my case study areas rather than on wider travels around the country, although these journeys enabled me to place the Ksamil Peninsula and Drino Valley into the broader context of Albania’s bunkerisation.

2008: 10 days of fieldwork for MA thesis with field surveys and interviews on Ksamil Peninsula
and further north along coastline. In Ksamil, a triple-set emplacement (Garnizon-3) of MSBs along coastline recorded by scale plan and section drawings. This trip included two days in Gjirokastër, with interview and first visit to the Gjirokastër Cold War tunnel complex.

2009: Three months on Ksamil Peninsula (working for Butrint Foundation) and Sarandë region with seven days in the Drino Valley. Undertook a Cultural Heritage Survey for the Butrint Foundation covering the Gjirokastër, Sarandë and Delvinë regions and used this time to also undertake rapid field survey of MSBs. I was able to assess different landscapes of MSBs through photography, sketches, and notes to identify zones for further study. Second visit was made to the Gjirokastër Cold War tunnel complex and first visit to the Gjirokastër concrete factory.

2010: Two months on Ksamil Peninsula (working for Butrint Foundation), conducted walkover surveys of coast and hinterland for MSBs with photography, sketches, and notes. Mapping of MSBs using a handheld GPS unit. First visit to Coperta Hill to explore and photograph Army Observation Base. One week spent in the Drino Valley to examine mid-valley area from Gjirokastër to the archaeological site of Antigonea. Second visit to the Gjirokastër concrete factory and on-site interview with three former workers.

2011: Ten days in Tiranë at libraries and archives (see Research Permissions and Challenges below), museums, the Institute of Archaeology and making additional research contacts. MSBs in Tiranë and the nearby Mount Dajti Park were photographed.

2012: Two months on Ksamil Peninsula (working for Butrint Foundation) to photograph coastal MSB destruction and re-use of elements. Interview undertaken with local heritage practitioner regarding MSB breaking. One week in Drino Valley to examine Albania-Greek border zone at Kakavijë and MSB breaking across wider valley. Two separate visits made to Gjirokastër concrete factory.

2013: Four days on Ksamil Peninsula to examine MSB destruction and impact of road widening from Sarandë to Butrint. Photography, notes, and discussions with local contacts.
2017: Three weeks in Albania for fieldwork and interviews in both study areas. MSBs mapped with handheld GPS, photographed, level of breaking recorded, MSB tourist products investigated. First visit to Çajupi Plain to see extant Type 5 MSBs on the high plateau and what remained en route from Gjirokastër. Final visit to Gjirokastër concrete factory. First visit to Vrion concrete factory with on-site interview. Time spent in Tiranë for interviews, visiting museums of communism and attempting to access Ministry of Defence archives. Undertook a single day with Albanian Trip on a bunker-tour to the west of Tiranë to comprehend these structures within the context of tourism.

Archaeological Fieldwork Scope

This draws upon my experience on archaeological excavations in the UK and abroad since 1995. I utilised skills of observation, judgement, logical practice, photography, annotated sketches, and scale drawings to explore and record MSBs. Within the confines of dealing with military remains, I followed Lowry’s preparation and approach towards surveying UK Home Front Second World War defences for the Defence of Britain project. Particularly relevant was the purpose of such a survey being to understand the site function and its relationship with surrounding sites within a historical context (Lowry 2002: 16–17).

As there was no possibility of excavation, the main tool I used was photography. I approached documenting MSBs like a professional building survey, photographing these structures in their wider landscape and making a visual context record of relationships with other MSBs or nearby features. Like McWilliams, I now have a personal archive of thousands of MSB photographs with only a fraction being included within this thesis (see McWilliams 2013: 26). These have been an invaluable resource which were used frequently in this research as memory markers for different years, to examine any changes and revisit internal and external MSB features or modifications.

Most importantly, these photographs were used in conjunction with my other empirical research to devise a framework of five MSB types derived from investigations in both areas. Devising my own typology also removed confusions within communist military terminology, as interview information did not always conform, and enabled me to digitally map MSBs with
confidence across both study areas (see Chapter 3). Inspiration was taken again from Lowry’s plans and elevations of UK pillboxes (Lowry 2004: 81, 84) by the creation of comparative drawings to communicate differences in the five-tier MSB typology (see Chapter 3).

Only MSBs with easy access were entered, and these investigations were an embodied other-worldly experience. The quiet echo of outside while the cooler temperature pricks the skin and the nose apprehensively twitches to source out any mess best avoided, from dead animals to excrement. In coastal locations, the viewshed from the MSB embrasure was often unchanged since communism – a Mediterranean seascape with crashing waves below. This was recorded photographically in the same way as external and internal communist or post-communist painting, dates, graffiti, gun mounts, or modern re-use evidence. The overgrown nature and hillside location of some MSBs meant it was difficult to get good landscape images that illustrated their density without losing impact. Such relatively small objects (2–3m diameter) tended to disappear at a distance in a manner that reflects their character as hidden tools of observation which, after a period of non-maintenance, have sunk deeper into the landscape.

Some MSB locations were mapped using a handheld GPS unit and information downloaded into the open source desktop programme QGIS (Quantum Geographical Information System) to geospatially position MSBs. It is possible that other studies of this kind would map transects across different areas of the country to examine distribution patterns and estimate numbers. In the case of Albania, this was not feasible as the wider border zones have a denser MSB concentration than the inner core of the country. It was decided that by fully mapping both border study areas, the maximum number of MSBs installed across Albania could be calculated and create an uppermost estimate for comparison with other figures (see Chapter 3).

Handheld GPS data was collected over two separate seasons (2010 and 2017) on extant or destroyed MSBs, but this did not form the full dataset due to time constraints. GPS data was supplemented with digital mapping in QGIS built over a Bing satellite basemap. This was not of sufficient image resolution to realistically plot MSB positions but was used in conjunction with high quality imagery hosted on the Albanian state authority website for geospatial information, known as ASIG (Autoriteti Shtetëror për Informacionin Gjeohapësinor, https://geoportal.asig.gov.al/en). This contains orthoimages of Albania from 2007 and 2015.
which facilitated an examination of the landscape before and after the 2011–2013 MSB destruction.

Paradoxically, mapping MSBs using this aerial imagery for the few years after they had been destroyed sometimes made it easier to discern positions. The MSB was exposed by broken up grey-white concrete and became more visible than when previously buried or overgrown. This made the absent present (Buchli and Lucas 2001b; Buchli 2010: 186), then absent again as time passed further and vegetation took over the rubble. Google Earth’s lesser resolution historical-maps were also consulted for reference as these go back to 2003–5 and it was helpful to see landscapes prior to modern development. This forensic mapping approach was time-consuming but enabled the creation of a typological distribution that I am confident is a valid representation of MSB installation.

**Anthropological Fieldwork Scope**

The large network of friends and colleagues I have built up since 2001 was my primary resource in taking this research forward anthropologically. While I was in the UK, people assisted with general MSB information gathering, updated me on current political angles for communist heritage and recommended places to visit for research. When in Albania, they suggested potential interviewees and provided on-site interview translations where necessary. This resulted in my gathering interviews from a range of former communist military personnel, technical specialists, factory workers or journalists. In addition, modern heritage specialists, financial or government employees, tour guides, bar or restaurant workers, drivers, artistic entrepreneurs, and the younger generation all with historical or current experience of MSB were interviewed. Most interviews were arranged, but some were spontaneous, conducted when meeting a person during field surveys.

I took a flexible approach to conducting interviews as with such a broad spectrum of participants it was not appropriate to use the same fixed set of questions as I wanted to gain understanding rather than information for statistics. Semi-structured interviews were relatively informal regarding MSB experiences and for people with similar roles under communism, questions were equated for comparison. After each interview, information gathered was re-
evaluated to identify knowledge gaps or what data needed to be reaffirmed. For example, the on-site interviews with former concrete factory workers were informal with a loose set of questions and themes which evolved as conversations progressed. Being in their former workplace facilitated an awareness of the spatial and temporal sense of place within the discussions which was reflected in the results. For both on-site and over-coffee interviews the informal approach seemed to be the most effective way of collating oral histories, information and lived experiences. On reflection, I think participants preferred to give information through conversational talking rather than an adherence to a question list, which to older generations still appears too much like communist bureaucracy.

Research Permissions and Challenges

A flexible approach within the fieldwork methodology and timings for field visits was a key element of the research strategy. Albanians tend to prefer to arrange things at short notice rather than be fixed well in advance, as plans can often change. Once understood, this can often be an advantage as taxis, hotels, visits, and assistance from people can be sourced quickly when needed. To undertake research and fieldwork in Albania I was required to apply for suitable permissions and encountered the following challenges:

- **Ethics:** The 2017 fieldwork was ethically approved by the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee (FREC) at the University of Bristol (Appendix D). This was amended to include my 2018 visit to Tiranë in October and gave approval to use 2008–2012 interview data on condition it was anonymised, as this was prior to the formal establishment of Bristol’s ethical approval system (Appendix E). Interviewees were given two Albanian or English documents.

  The ‘Participant Information Sheet’ detailed information about this study, the purposes of my research and informed that assistance was entirely voluntary. It also contained details regarding their involvement (potential risks or benefits), what it would mean and what rights they had if they wished to withdraw. Interviewees kept this document as a record of the study and as a way of contacting myself or the University
The ‘Ethical Consent Form’ for the project was to be signed by the interviewee and outlined the main points of the ‘Participant Information Sheet’ with tick boxes to agree or disagree that they had: been provided with enough information, given the opportunity to ask any questions, allowed to make an informed decision on being interviewed, told they could remain anonymous and that that collected data could be withdrawn in an agreeable timeframe or be utilised in future publications.

Those who consented to be named appear in this thesis under their names and initials, whereas those who preferred anonymity, or were interviewed in previous years, have an interviewee number, e.g. IN-4. See Appendix F for a full list. Finally, permissions were sought from people who appear in personal photos used in this thesis.

- **Permissions:** The fieldwork for my research in Albania was supported with approvals given by Professor Dr. Luan Përzhita the Director of the Institute of Archaeology in Tiranë (Appendix G). Tiranë archive and library research was undertaken in 2011 and an access for research letter was provided by Diana Ndrenika, the Director of the Albanian Heritage Foundation. This enabled me to visit the following places without membership: Central State Archives (AQSH — Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror), Central State Film Archive (AQSHF — Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror i Filmit) and the National Library.

Access to the Ministry of Defence Archives had not been possible in 2011, therefore two months prior to my 2017 visit I contacted the Head of Ministry of Defence Archives, Dr. Teki Kurti, in post since 2013 when the Democratic Party of Albania lost to the Socialist Party of Albania. Despite positive indications given during a meeting and interview with Dr. Kurti, no permission was granted. On my return home I received a letter that confirmed I was unable to use the archives, signed by a job title rather than a named person (Appendix H). This was disappointing, but understandable within the political context of communist archives as they cannot risk access in case something is found that may prove controversial. Subsequent discussions with Albanian academics at the 2018 Albanian Studies conference revealed that they also had been unsuccessful in gaining access.
• **Language:** My basic level of the Albanian language, gained through time spent in the country, was invaluable for travelling around as I could hold discussions with non-English speaking people. When required, I was able to arrange an interpreter through my contacts for formal interviews. It is paramount that any interpreter should comprehend the overarching aims of the research being undertaken and give a true account of what was said. I was lucky in this respect as the colleagues who undertook this work with me were trustworthy, supportive, and understood my aims.

• **Accessibility:** Albania is easy to reach to with direct flights from London to Tiranë, but for the south it is quicker to fly to Corfu and take the ferry to Sarandë. Travelling around Albania is easy with coaches running between main cities and minibuses in rural locations. Occasional taxis were used for more remote places and I was flexible enough to build my research trips around transport offers from friends.

• **Costs:** This PhD has been self-funded, but I was granted financial assistance towards the 2017 fieldtrip from the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Bristol. Additional money for a Tiranë Albanian Studies symposium (October 2018) was awarded by the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology and the University of Bristol Alumni fund. At this conference I presented my research on Albanian bunkers, made new contacts, and undertook trips to the Elbasan steelworks factory and the Tiranë Bunk’Art 1 and 2 Museums.

• **Archaeology and Anthropology:** Contemporary or historical archaeology are not concepts used in Albania and archaeological teaching has relied on a traditional scope of enquiry inherited from communist practice (Galaty and Watkinson 2004b). There remains a pre-fifteenth century (Ottoman period) archaeological focus, particularly on the prehistoric to Roman eras. It was only in 2010 that the first assessment of Industrial Archaeology in Albania was conducted (Parangoni 2010) and as a sub-discipline, it is dominated by communist developments which devalue any comprehension of its historical importance. The Ottoman era and beyond tends to be examined within the disciplines of Folk Heritage, Ethnology, Anthropology and History with very little
interdisciplinarity occurring between them. Recently there have been signs of change with integrated conferences and publications by the Institute for Democracy, Media, and Culture (IDMC) on the media, apathy, memory, and nostalgia of communism (Godole and Danaj 2015; Godole and Idrizi 2019). These have begun to address this issue by promoting cross disciplinary research discussions and frameworks.

• **Health and Safety:** On most of my site visits I was accompanied by a colleague, friend, or taxi driver with the only occurrences of lone working being around Ksamil. I arranged phone check-in times with the owner of the hotel I was staying in and they knew when to expect me back. MSBs are openly accessible structures, but in some places the land they are on has been enclosed for private businesses or development. Often a chat with somebody nearby can facilitate access but this is not always the case. MSBs are relatively well-lit and safe in comparison to other bunkers and tunnels which can contain rubbish, tipped furniture, wildlife such as bats, mosquitoes, scorpions, snakes, or wild dogs. Caution should be exercised regarding general bunker explorations in Albania as some bunkers have been used for drug or contraband storage and curiosity may be considered suspicious. There is also the potential for encountering remnant munitions, which should always be considered volatile.

**Concluding Comments**

The original idea of this thesis had been to examine a wide range of defensive relics in the landscape, but ultimately became focused on MSBs once the depth of research potential for these objects was realised. Primarily this was through how I envisaged their inter-relationships with people. These possibilities were considered through complex socio-political, historical, and economical object materialities, encapsulated by these numerous, but repetitive, concrete MSB forms that had developed a greater diversity of meaning after the fall of the regime. With the post-2005 change of attitude in the country I was confident that through my archaeological background and Albania experiences, I could investigate these structures on their own. In this, I attempted to draw out hitherto unacknowledged aspects of their social lives and take similar localised experiences towards something resembling a wider national practice.
This chapter has outlined an interdisciplinary modern conflict approach using archaeological and anthropological literature, appropriate for examining MSBs as singular and collective entities. These enable both study areas to connect for differential comparison purposes and facilitate the extension of localised narratives towards a national level of consciousness during and beyond communism. Much of the existing literature on Albanian MSBs tends to be relatively broad and treats these objects as a single event imposed on the landscape as an extreme event of numbers.

Other works investigate the re-use of MSBs or architecturally propose potential new uses in ways that have blurred them with other Cold War Albanian structures. The lack of detailed literature or access to official documentation regarding their installation means that to go deeper, a theoretically nuanced investigative approach was needed. One which can utilise localised landscapes to draw out practical narratives of MSB experience to examine unofficial or intangible aspects under communism and beyond.
Approaching the MSB: Conceptual Framework and Typology

Enver Hoxha... was the most tragic figure in our history. You cannot stand anywhere in Albania without seeing bunkers. He buried us in bunkers. Sali Berisha, Democratic Party Leader, 1992 (Sullivan 1992, quoted in Hall 1994: 153).

Conceptual Framework for MSBs

Within much of Albania’s communist landscape, state induced transformations were only possible through technological developments (Rugg 1994: 70). I would further argue that this technological progression was only realised through Albania’s global networks feeding into localised landscapes. Access to international expertise and manufacturing materials were supplied directly by the USSR and China or paid for by these partners and imported via another Eastern Bloc country. This illustrates how Albania was financially and materially able to realise the MSB scheme. Essentially, they only needed to provide labour and time, but the scale to which it grew caused shortages in other aspects of life, such as housing and road development (e.g. Dalakoglou 2017).

Saunders termed the Western Front of the First World War as a ‘symbolic landscape for our time’ which contained deeply formative human experiences (2001b: 37). Since the fall of communism, Albania has become perceived in a similar symbolic manner as an extreme Cold War landscape of bunkers whose people must have suffered within such oppressive surroundings. Bickert has called for researchers on communist Albania to consider wider legacies of that period as such a focus on MSBs or bunkers has led them to ‘become a stereotypical element of the country’s historic socialist landscape’ and that ‘their sheer number and their unique appearance somehow justify the attention paid to them’ (2015: 107–8). I agree with this statement, particularly when considering the lack of in-depth research conducted within some works on Albanian bunkers. Albania clearly contains a vast wealth of research potential for cultural legacies derived from agricultural, industrial, urban, and rural
developments along with the wider social or human experiences formed as the country played catch up with the rest of Europe. However, I would argue that the MSB is the ultimate icon of that period as it encapsulates the political, social, and technological journey Albania had taken since the close of the Second World War.

Over the short space of nearly fifty years (1944–1991), Albania was reorganised to become industrialised and centralised, then was de-industrialised and de-centralised in a cataclysmic shift as communism collapsed. MSBs are the product created within this boom and have been a defining feature of Albania since the bust. In this way their social life has mirrored that of the Albanian people, many of whom view their construction as a complete waste of resources (Rugg 1994: 72). However, the affective qualities and features embodied within MSBs have also provoked and captured the imagination of non-Albanians to cultivate a ‘foreign-fascination’ towards these objects.

The MSB programme in Albania was one of several paid or voluntary communist government schemes which utilised the population’s time and labour for national benefit. Unlike works that involved terrace digging, railway building, road construction and agriculture, the civilian and military involvement in the MSB scheme was physical, psychological, and ongoing through military training and maintenance tasks. starting from the late 1960s, reaching a peak between 1978 and 1983, and declining after the 1985 death of Enver Hoxha.

The planning, manufacture, installation, school education, practical training use and ongoing maintenance of MSBs and trenches involved a large proportion of Albania’s population over time. Even those who were not directly involved were ultimately impacted as bunker numbers across the whole country increased. This visual message communicated a nationalistic war-mentality and MSBs became the physical embodiment of a social understanding that reinforced the Habitus of communist-life in Albania (Bourdieu 1977). In this way, the proliferation of MSBs across Albania served only to keep the population busy and distract people from their living conditions and lack of political pluralism (Pandolfi 2002; 205). The materiality surrounding the MSB programme created an intertwined conflict relationship between people and their local to nationalised landscape.

MSBs were the Albanian equivalent of the Maginot Line, the name of which has become symbolic with a passive and inadequate defence policy, a construction likened to a giant ‘White Elephant’ (Kaufmann 1988). The military consumed enormous economic resources and in 1975
Albania used a defence budget nearly twice that of Yugoslavia, more than double that of Greece, and over four times that of Italy (Prifti 1978: 221). Johnson states that: ‘Fear was probably the single most important characteristic of the Cold War’ (Johnson 2002: 227), which would partly account for Albania’s abnormally high expenditure on defence. The enormity of this financial commitment made it necessary for the state to offset costs by using free or cheap labour wherever possible for the bunker programme. To work for the Party as an unpaid ‘volunteer’ was classed as education and for a while was a compulsory element of schooling over the whole country under the ideological conviction that everybody and everything needed to be ready if Albania was to be protected. Joint works such as these linked schooling and the army at an early age (See Chapter 4).

Albanians had long been conditioned not to question the MSB scheme because a perception of secrecy and national interest had been projected towards these objects and the people. As mentioned earlier (see Chapter 2), MSBs did not feature within communist literature which reinforced the sense of a shared secret between leadership and population. Figure 5 shows a painting by Sotir Capo, in a 1968 communist magazine, which shows Mehmet Elezi doing his duty as a border guard (‘Kufitari’) with an MSB in the background. This is the only communist-era artistic representation of an MSB I have found across twelve years of research. Like most aspects of communism, the scene depicted by this painting is a form of social engineering by way of propaganda. Mehmet Elezi went to work as a border guard to replace his brother (Agron Elezi) who was killed by an earthquake in 1967. It is not known whether this painting captures a real or imagined scene, but the message was explained in Socialist Realist terms by Sadi Petrela, who recognised it as dogma encapsulating the heroic spirit of New-Albania. SP said this painting personified a person created by the Party who was being watched by the State, represented by the MSB and wide embrasure-eye (SP, 06.04.17). This illustrates the intent of the MSB scheme, even at this early stage, and demonstrates how the State considered both person and object as tools for the future of Albania.
On November 5th, 1974, the former Albanian Minister of Defence Beqir Balluku, was executed by firing squad. He had been purged along with three other high ranking officials for high treason against Albania. Balluku had spoken out against the MSB scheme since its late-
1960s inception, mainly because he felt the egalitarian ideals contained within the concept of a people’s defence devalued those who were militarily trained (Fevziu 2016: 212–217). Balluku denounced the upscaled MSB production and installation, which had started from 1972, and belittled Hoxha’s plans for the full bunkerisation of Albania. This was well publicised at the time and was mentioned by several interviewees as to why the rest of the population had been wary of the MSB scheme and exercised caution not to be overheard discussing it (See Chapter 4). The fear aspect is key to why many people were guarded, which led them to develop a complex, unsettled and emotionally intertwined relationship with MSBs.

**MSB Typology**

Albania’s MSB scheme was developed and implemented during Albania’s alliance with China, which lasted from 1961–1978. Whilst partnered with China, Albania had been provided with $5000M worth of Chinese economic and military aid (Anon: 1979: 58). Most notable for this research, was the provision of cement and the pledge to build a huge (c.460km²) metallurgical complex at Elbasan (Mëhilli 2017: 213). The ideological importance of this industrial plant was reflected in its ‘Steel of the Party’ name, and by Hoxha who called its construction the ‘second liberation’ of Albania, thereby conceptually linking it to an earlier event: the communist partisans’ Second World War liberation of Albania (Zickel and Iwaskiw 1994: 150; Brunnbauer et al 2013: 8).

Although construction started on the Elbasan metallurgical complex during the mid-1960s, it stalled numerous times with only a few smaller factories operating until a renewed completion effort was included within Albania’s fifth 5-year economic growth plan (1971–75). The relationship between Albania and China deteriorated during this period with Albanian accusations of sabotage, due to delays in supplies arriving from China. Ultimately this meant that the Elbasan metallurgical complex was not fully completed until after 1978, when Albania was left to finish the works alone (Hall 1994: 114).

The Elbasan metallurgical complex had been intended to reduce Albania’s dependence on imports, but the ongoing building delays suggests it is likely that most MSB steel reinforcement bars, or rebars, were imported from, or paid for, by China. It is possible that
simple objects like rebars could have been produced at Elbasan from imported casting products, but not until the early 1980s after more of the metal processing plants had become active (Bici 2007:94). As with so many issues regarding the specifics of Albania’s communist past, it is difficult to confirm or refute the provenance of MSB rebars. Other researchers of the Elbasan steelworks have found official data difficult to source and have had to rely on the results of their own oral interviews with former workers (V. Nonaj 2018 pers. comm. 11 October).

Mëhilli has observed how is possible to recognise the temporal distinctions of Albania’s shifting global partnerships by changes in architectural forms. He suggests this is feasible for constructions such as housing blocks, which were overseen by the centralised state yet relied on provisions supplied by an external partner (Mëhilli 2017: 185). As Albania changed from Yugoslavia to the USSR then to China and finally isolation, each change produced a distinct material culture which reflected financial, technical, and material aid provision (ibid.).

Distinctions based on provision can also be noted within Albania’s MSB scheme as the process and designs became more refined through centralised control and the increased use of prefabrication. As with many communist countries of that period, Albania regarded prefabrication as the modern way forward to solve many construction problems, specifically the housing need for a growing population. To address this, modular ideas, materials, designs, and assembly processes were requested from China (Mëhilli 2017: 183). Across the wider socialist world ‘officials, planners and architects themselves obsessed over monotony and uniformity’ (ibid.: 186) to drive forward simplicity in construction, and for Albania became the blueprint for most constructions, including MSBs.

As Albania moved towards its post-1978 isolationist stance, the rate of MSB manufacture and installation increased to the detriment of other constructions such as housing. Between 1977 and 1981, the communist leadership invested an estimated 2% of net material product in the construction and installation of prefabricated cement bunkers (Galaty et al 1999: 202; O’Donnell 1999:137; Zickel and Iwaskiw 1994: 115).

For this thesis, discussions regarding Albania’s concrete producing ability were held with a former Designer and Chief of Sector at the Tiranë Institute of Studies and Projects for Home Defence (1979–1990). He explained that from 1974 many of the cement related industries increased their capacity to quarry and process Albanian raw materials for the MSB programme. In addition, imports from China would come by boat into Durrës port and
sometimes be marked as Albanian before distribution to imply homeland production. MSB cement for later types was very fine which created a solid product, usually between 400–600 grade, meaning 400–600kg was needed to make 1m³, compared to the 200–250 grade used for prefabricated housing elements (IN-2, 24.06.08; IN-11, 07.04.17).

MSBs across the Albanian landscape appear to be repetitive objects, but fieldwork for both case study areas (as discussed later in Chapters 4 and 5) highlighted physical differences and variations in form which reflect how technological developments drove escalating levels of production. These can be used to explore how variation in poured-concrete forms evolved towards standardisation through prefabrication, using increasingly larger, but fewer, MSB elements.

To comprehend these complexities within my fieldwork, it was necessary to develop a typology which would frame these empirical differences within the Albanian landscape. This created five MSB types based on form, material components, chronology, and their topographical location. It was clear that such a typology was required too because within existing literature any typological investigations of MSBs were limited to generic communist personnel bunker terms (e.g. see Francis 2013), whose meaning is not immediately obvious, for example

- ‘QZ’ — Centre of Fire / Firing Position (Qendër Zjarri)
- ‘QZP’ — Permanent Fire Centre (Qendra të Pëhershme Zjarri)

In addition, discussions and interviews conducted with Albanians who had military experience yielded differences regarding the specific terms used for each MSB type under the communist regime (Table 1).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hismet Osmani</th>
<th>IN-12</th>
<th>Thesis Typology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 30</td>
<td>Type B1 (single embrasure) or B2 (double embrasure) B=Breshkë which means Turtle or Tortoise</td>
<td>Type 1 MSB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 33 — larger</td>
<td>Type M33 — larger</td>
<td>Type 2 MSB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 35 — smaller</td>
<td>Type M31 — smaller</td>
<td>Type 2 MSB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Position Topi 75mm (Gun Position)</td>
<td>Type 3 MSB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 31</td>
<td>Old Type QZ (1960s–70s)</td>
<td>Type 4 MSB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Type M30</td>
<td>Type 5 MSB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Comparison of communist MSB terms to thesis typology

Interestingly, only some of this information tallied in the overall analysis of types which may be a consequence of local variations, my misinterpretation, or their misremembering and consultation of Ministry of Defence archives could not resolve this. For clarification and to simplify these, a new typology was developed to avoid creating additional confusion and which allowed me to digitally map MSBs with confidence to reflect differences within the study areas.

This five-tier MSB typology developed organically over time while noting differences during fieldwork, having discussions with people on the ground and spending time examining my photographic archive. It was finalised after my Albania fieldwork concluded in 2017 (see Chapter 2) and when I began MSB mapping in QGIS. The resulting five types of MSB chronologically span the mid-late 1960s until 1989, thereby covering Albania’s relationship with China and into its isolation period (Figures 6 and 7).
Figure 6: MSB Types 1, 2 and 3 — Sections and Plans at 1:50 Scale (© author)
Figure 7: MSB Types 4 and 5 — Sections and Plans at 1:50 Scale (© author)
As a disclaimer, it should be stressed that these five MSB types are what was encountered in the study areas, which represents 3.86% of the national area. In other parts of Albania different variations of these MSB types exist as do others which are not included here; for example, near Tiranë an MSB type has been observed that is formed like a Type 1, but double the size, measuring 6m in diameter. Dates given for installation are also approximate and reflect only what was observed in the study areas and discussed in interviews.

*Type 1 MSBs: 1975–1989*

Depending on its location, this MSB type was configured using between four and seven prefabricated concrete elements: Two body halves, two cap halves, a rear entrance box tunnel and, if constructed superterranean, two stacked frontal semi-circular buffers (Figure 8). They were designed to be installed along flat areas such as valley floors and coastal plains, and elevated areas where vehicle access was possible. Production of Type 1 MSBs started from the mid-1970s, after a period of design and experimentation led to the manufacture of numerous metal moulds to create the forms of these large pieces.

![Figure 8: Type 1 MSB installations at former army base, Vivari Channel, Ksamil Peninsula, 2009 (© author)](image-url)
Two different cap forms were noted, one with a single wide embrasure and the other contains two smaller embrasures. Type 1 MSBs were placed in lines of single, spaced out bunkers or configured in groups of three (Garnizon-3) or five (Garnizon-5), usually with interconnecting tunnels to the rear. Garnizon-3 configurations generally had a two-embrasure MSB in the centre and single embrasure MSBs on either side to cover a wide viewshed (Figures 9 and 10).

Garnizon-5 positions were most notably encountered in the Drino Valley study area and were essentially Garnizon-3s with additional MSBs on each end. These were often flanked by one or two Type 3 MSBs to create a lined unit of six or seven MSBs (IN-12, 13.10.18). The digital mapping for this thesis showed that configurations can vary as viewshed positions were dependent on surrounding features and other MSBs.
Most Type 1 MSB caps were formed of two halves with loopholes to manoeuvre them into position where they were fixed with steel brackets and cement. Usually this was finished off using a concrete render inside and out to cover joints, but examples have been seen without this. Their prefabricated nature means that Type 1 MSBs are more consistent in form than any other type, but some variations were noted in fieldwork. This included instances where an external thick steel plate had been fitted across the forward-facing half of the cap for additional...
protection, and where the central Garnizon-3 MSB cap (with two embrasures) was prefabricated out of a single smaller element with a solitary lifting loophole (Figure 11).

![Figure 11: Variant of central Garnizon-3 Type 1 MSB, smaller cap with single loophole, Ksamil Peninsula coastline, 2008 (© author)](image)

**Type 2 MSBs: 1972–1980**

Type 2 MSBs comprised two layers of numerous prefabricated radial segments fixed with steel plates and concrete to create a domed cap which has the appearance of orange segments. This MSB type was installed semi-subterranean in regularly spaced out linear positions, usually with rear connecting trenches (Figure 12). There is variety in construction style as the shape of prefabricated elements was not fully standardised and differences in factory production can be seen where some radial elements are broader than others with prefabricated body
segments varying in shape. These were installed in Albania from 1972 and were designed for hills, mountains, and locations away from roads, meaning parts could be carried to their mounting positions by hand. It is unclear when Type 2 MSB production stopped as none were found to contain dates, but I did interview someone who installed them in 1979, and so 1980 is an estimate.

Figure 12: Type 2 MSBs in linear formation overlooking Corfu, Ksamil Peninsula, 2008 (© author)
Cap segments were fixed in-situ over a subterranean body of stonework or multiple curved prefabricated segments that fitted together to create stacked penannular shaped walls. Entrances mostly utilised a series of thin prefabricated concrete frames which created a box-doorway, leading in from the trench line (Figure 13). The embrasure was formed using prefabricated concrete frames with an overhanging steel plate (Figure 14). The smaller Type 2 MSB, as listed in Table 1 above, was used where accessibility was problematic (Figure 15). This Type 2 variant was narrow in diameter with bitumen and stone over prefabricated radial elements and concrete flanks around the embrasure. The small size and dazzle effect of the surrounding stonework meant these were well camouflaged and difficult to see during digital mapping.

Figure 13: Type 2 MSB ‘half-sectioned’ by hillside terracing for construction works, Sarandë town, 2009 (© author)
Figure 14: Type 2 MSB embrasure with steel plate, Ksamil Peninsula coastline, 2008 (© author)

Figure 15: Smaller Type 2 MSB with stone and concrete rendering for protection and camouflage, Cape Stilo, south of Ksamil Peninsula, 2009 (© author)
Type 3 MSBs: 1975–1985

These comprise open-backed superterranean firing positions formed of three prefabricated elements: the cap, body piece and frontal buffer with stone packing to cushion any impact (Figure 16, see also Figure 6).

As noted previously, these were usually positioned with Type 1 MSB formations in locations along flat plains, coastlines, and low foothills. Interviewee IN-12 described this MSB as for protection when throwing grenades and using 75mm guns (see Table 1).
Type 4 MSBs: 1967–1972

This type has the most variations in terms of MSB size and shape because construction was of shuttered poured-concrete either entirely, or as a basic observation cap fitted over a base constructed of stone (Figure 17). Some constructions used prefabricated concrete box-frames for the embrasure, but the defining feature of these structures were their creation in-situ with coarse concrete over a light rebar mesh.

Due to the individual nature of their construction, Type 4 MSBs can range in size from large to small, with some more mushroom-like than others depending on how the cap was finished off (Figure 18). The plan and profile depicted in Figure 7 was based on a style seen on the Ksamil Peninsula, but many variants exist. Type 4 MSBs were installed from 1967 as single positions, but as technology and MSB production progressed, they were added to with Type 1 or 2 MSBs to create extended stop-lines (Figure 19).

Figure 17: Type 4 MSB, observation cap shuttered in-situ and positioned over stone-lined subterranean base, Jorgucat, Drino Valley, 2012 (© author)
Figure 18: Type 4 MSB adjacent to Butrint road, Vivari Channel, Ksamil Peninsula, 2008 (© author)

Figure 19: Large Type 4 MSB with camouflage and Type 1 additions north of Sarandë town, 2009 (© author)
Type 5 MSBs: 1967–1978

Type 5 MSBs have two main design forms: Linear and T-shaped. They were assembled in-situ using small to moderate prefabricated concrete elements with stone and concrete. In a similar manner to Type 2 MSBs, these were manufactured for installation in high or difficult to access locations. Linear Type 5 MSBs were semi-subterranean, rectangular structures which incorporated a covered trench line at the rear, acting as both bunker and tunnel. Many of these had a high frontage of stepped stone, sometimes rendered, for shell-fire deflection (Figure 20).

As illustrated in Figure 7, the embrasure of T-shaped Type 5 MSBs was contained within a forward protruding section (on the ‘T’ base) joined onto a rear tunnel (along the ‘T’ top) with entrances at each end. T-shaped Type 5 MSBs were installed as superterranean where no trench was required, or semi-subterranean where the tunnel fed out into an existing trench (Figure 21).
Type 5 MSBs were installed from the late 1960s and continued until the late 1970s as evidenced by dates seen inscribed on positions. Early Type 5 MSBs were used to fortify remote higher ground areas, such as the Çajupi Plain in the Drino Valley (see Chapter 5). In comprising small moveable prefabricated elements, Type 5 MSBs functioned like Type 2 MSBs but were not replaced by them. The adaptability of Type 5 MSB forms and small elements meant that designs could be constructed on difficult rocky terrain, as seen in the Drino Valley where they were positioned along forward edges of steep rocky ravines (Figure 22).
MSB Mapping

MSB distribution patterns in both case study areas were examined to see how installations evolved and whether their locations were militarily advantageous. On the Ksamil Peninsula the bunkerisation effort appears to have been directed along the forward-facing coastline and hills (Figures 23 and 24). No installations were found on the rear slopes beyond the central peninsular ridge. This MSB landscape development started in the late 1960s when Type 4 MSBs were distributed in small numbers across the landscape. This was significantly expanded during the early-late 1970s when Type 2 MSBs were installed to create long segmented MSB chains of defence. These were connected by trenches and installed in-depth with retreating lines along coastal areas and along higher hillsides. This network was further developed in the late 1970s with Type 1 and 3 MSBs which re-fortified key areas where road access was present, such as army bases and along the central coastline zone.
Figure 23: Map of northern Ksamil Peninsula showing MSB types mapped for this thesis (© author)
Figure 24: Map of southern Ksamil Peninsula showing MSB types mapped for this thesis (© author)
Figure 25: Map of northern Drino Valley showing MSB types mapped for this thesis (© author)
Figure 26: Map of southern Drino Valley showing MSB types mapped for this thesis (© author)
Figure 27: Map showing density of MSB installations across the Drino Valley plain as mapped for this thesis (© author)
There are significantly more MSBs in the Drino Valley (Figures 25 and 26) than on the Ksamil Peninsula. Aside from the greater size of this study area, it demonstrates how land-borders, particularly those with flat plains, were regarded as providing less natural defence than was afforded by coastal areas like the Ksamil Peninsula. From the late 1960s, the Drino Valley was populated with a spread of Type 4 MSBs along the central plain, lower foothills and border-zone with Greece. Type 5 MSBs were also installed from this time on higher positions along valley sides, forward-facing ravine edges and on the mountainous Çajupi Plain. Type 2 MSBs were installed from 1972 to provide additional defence from the valley edges up to higher mountainous areas. From the mid-1970s a dense installation of Type 1 and 3 MSBs was instigated across the flat plain. This created multiple fighting-fronts and retreating defence lines comprised of Type 1 Garnizon-5 MSBs and Type 3 MSBs positioned along field boundaries (Figure 27).

The topography of the Drino Valley was used to create a solid defence though the high number of all MSB types installed and, like the Ksamil Peninsula, no MSBs were installed on rear slopes or locations without a suitable viewshed. Primarily this is reflected by installations along the flat valley plain but can also be seen in the fortification of foothills leading up to mountaintops. It must be noted that the complexity of the Drino Valley’s militarised communist landscape goes far beyond MSBs, and these additional infrastructures are themselves in need of investigation.

**MSB Numbers**

As mentioned previously, the precise number of MSBs in Albania is unknown (see Chapter 2). As the country has opened towards tourism, with increasing visitor numbers over the past 15 years, there has been a tendency to quote the more extreme eye-catching end of the scale. This is particularly, but not exclusively, the case within non-academic literature. The figure of 750,000 has become folkloric and is now perceived as truth within Albania’s bunker story. It stems from Stefa and Mydyti’s 2008 MA research, which resulted in their 2012 publication ‘Concrete Mushrooms: Reusing Albania’s 750,000 abandoned bunkers’, although even they admit that the precise number is impossible to tell (Stefa and Mydyti 2012: 29). Perhaps the numerical
disparities are to some degree inconsequential when considering that Albania’s defence provision was not tested by the destructive powers of a Cold War attack. However, based on my research, 750,000 is false information created without documentary evidence, but has become ‘fact through repetition’ and the copy/paste culture of some writers.

Stefa and Mydyti based their estimate of 750,000 on communist propaganda that the state’s leadership had provided one bunker for every four people, and as Albania had a population of three million, it was concluded that 750,000 were built (ibid.: 44–45). The logic of this calculation is somewhat questionable. Albania created a wide range of concrete bunker and tunnel types for different purposes, much of which was for storage or military personnel rather than civilians. In addition, neither of the two ‘mushroom’ bunker styles used by Stefa and Mydyti in their research, the MSB or the larger PZ, were designed for whole population protection in the way that civilian air raid shelters were. Trained civilians were expected to fight from MSBs in the event of an attack, but not everybody was, so the calculation of one bunker for every four Albanians falls. While my research does not dispute that Albania was heavily fortified with bunkers, comparable only to Switzerland in the European context of Cold War civil defence (Pike 2013: 59), it clearly does not support this propaganda-derived figure.

The answer to any quantitative assessment of MSB numbers question may lie somewhere in state military or construction archives. Such a potential source is hinted at the Tiranë Bunk’Art 1 museum where a compilation of 1983 defensive maps of Albanian territory is reproduced on display (Figure 28). This is accompanied by an information panel which explains that from 1975–1983 the construction of 221,143 bunkers was planned, but only 173,371 were realised. As this figure covers a shorter period than was reflected by fieldwork for this research, my approach here towards quantifying the position and number of MSBs in Albania was to record them in-situ and create a digital GIS map (see Chapter 2 Methodology).
Figure 28: Map of Albanian military defences in 1983, displayed at Bunk’Art 1 Museum, Tiranë, 2018 (© author)
A total of 8893 Type 1–5 MSBs were mapped across both case study areas (Table 2). These figures can be used to estimate the total number of MSBs installed across Albania.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSB Type</th>
<th>Ksamil Peninsula, Sarandë</th>
<th>Drino Valley, Gjirokastër</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1 MSBs</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>5336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2 MSBs</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>1356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3 MSBs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4 MSBs</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5 MSBs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
<td>1206</td>
<td>7687</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Type 1–5 MSB numbers mapped in both case study areas

Albania covers a total area of 28,748 km² and the combined area mapped for this thesis was 1,108.52 km². By dividing the study area into the total geographic area of Albania, a figure of 25.93 is reached, which represents the fraction of the country area which was mapped.

This can be used as a multiplier for the total 8893 MSBs mapped to reach an estimated number of MSBs in Albania as being 230,595. By incorporating a 20% contingency (46,120) to account for MSBs missed during mapping or removed prior to the earliest aerial representations of Albania, in this case the 2003–5 Google Maps, the figure reached is 276,715 MSBs.

In summary:

- Ksamil Peninsula case study area size: **25.28m²**
- Drino Valley case study area size: **1083.24km²**

  - Total size of both study areas: **1,108.52km²**
  - Total size of Albania: **8,748 km²**
  - 28,748 km² ÷ 1108.52km² = **25.93** (the fraction of Albania mapped)

- Total MSBs in both study areas 8893 x 25.93 = **230,595 MSBs (+20% = 276,715)**
As stated in the Introduction, the focus of this thesis is on MSBs, but to refute any arguments about why they are not included within ‘mushroom’ number discussions, I also mapped PZ bunkers in the study areas. Although none were present on the Ksamil Peninsula, the Drino Valley contained 62 PZ bunkers.

The above calculation (62 x 25.93) would add 1608 PZ bunkers onto the 230,595 MSBs mapped in this research, making a total of 232,203. By incorporating a 20% contingency (46,440) on this combined number, an estimated total of 278,643 MSB and PZ bunkers is reached.

In summary:

- Ksamil Peninsula PZ bunkers: 0
- Drino Valley PZ bunkers: 62
  - 62 PZ bunkers x 25.93 (the fraction of Albania mapped) = 1608 PZ bunkers

- 1608 PZ bunkers + 230,595 MSBs = 232,203 ‘mushroom-style’ bunkers (+20% = 278,643)

This illustrates how relatively insignificant the incorporation of PZ bunkers is regarding numbers. Less than two thousand are estimated to have been installed across Albania compared to the far greater MSB only figure.

Key points for consideration regarding the figures reached above are location of mapped areas and my typology. Both study areas are border locations, their MSB numbers are particularly high, and this density reduces towards Albania’s hinterland. This means that the figures calculated by this fieldwork should be taken as an uppermost limit of what was installed in communist Albania. In addition, this is based on my five-tier MSB typology and others may dispute the inclusion of Type 4 and 5 MSBs. These were installed prior to the 1973 initiation of Albania’s main MSB period and are not as uniformly ‘mushroom’ shaped as Types 1 to 3.

By utilising the additional 20% to cover any margin of loss, this thesis calculates that the highest possible figure for the number of MSB and PZ bunkers installed in Albania is 278,643. This means it is roughly one third of the 750,000 figure and illustrates how this long-standing popular figure really has been derived from communist fantasy propaganda and
further highlights the problem of not being able to access whatever official archives exist. Despite this, the notion of there being 750,000 MSBs has been given credence through its repetition. This has occurred within Albania and across foreign written works, serving only to sensationalise Albania’s bunkerisation for touristic or headline catching reasons.

Concluding Comments

Outwardly, MSBs are seemingly monotonous and repetitive objects, a series of intense ideological constructs created by a centralised regime which favoured standardisation as a form of control over landscape and people. Thus, experiences involving the MSB programme in one part of Albania would have largely been repeated in another, although some variation was inevitable. In this research, the density of installations along border areas created an abundance of material from which to examine how people have created dialogues with these objects.

MSBs have an individual (local) and collective (national) agency to events that have occurred in Albania’s temporal space from communism to post-communism. People build relationships with objects in their locale, even those which inspire emotional responses such as fear or threat, are idealised within the physicality of the MSB, and it is their response to these which help them navigate their worlds. The lives of people and MSBs are intertwined, and this is further reinforced by the anthropomorphic qualities of MSBs meaning they personify people physically and embody their experiences. These are powerful objects which have generated social lives and cultural biographies embedded within the social lives of Albanians, and which have evolved temporally with a shift in perception and meanings as time has passed.

Discussions of MSBs in popular literature and uncritical works tend to imply that only a singular form was present in the Albanian landscape, and typically they mean what is here referred to as the more numerous Type 1 MSBs. Albania’s bunkerisation programme however included more than one kind of small mushroom-shaped personnel bunker. The mapping and field investigation aspects of this research have demonstrated that distinct variations exist which are time-specific and based on the availability of materials, which evolved as technology progressed to improve the manufacturing process.
The field survey and mapping research for this thesis has shown it is unlikely that 750,000 MSBs were produced and installed in Albania, the actual figure being far lower than Stefa and Mydyti’s estimate, but a little higher than what was presented at Bunk’Art 1. The five-tier typology presented earlier reveals that MSB installation started earlier and finished later than the 1975–1983 dates provided on the communist map held at Bunk’Art 1 (see Figure 29). It is unlikely that only a single series of maps was created and, without knowing what else may be present in the archives, this can only be taken as a snapshot of 1983. The dates I include in my typology will be further elaborated and explored in subsequent chapters through fieldwork at MSB-producing communist concrete factories and data from people who worked on their installation and related undertakings (see Chapters 4 and 5).
Chapter 4

Case Study 1: Ksamil Peninsula, Sarandë

Introduction

The focus of this case study is the Ksamil Peninsula on Albania’s southernmost coastline close to Corfu. The etymology of the name Ksamil is the Greek ‘Examili’, meaning ‘six miles’, which is just longer than the 8.5km length of this case study area which measures widths of between 4.8km (maximum) at the south and 0.32km (minimum) at the northernmost extreme, covering an area of 25.28km² (Figure 29).

As a result of my undertaking fieldwork on the Ksamil Peninsula each year from 2008–2012 and with visits in 2013 and 2017, this chapter has covered communist landscape evolutions which are broader than MSB installations. This notes elements of pre-MSB defensive landscapes which were encountered during fieldwork as examples of militarisation with Yugoslavian and USSR assistance. This was to contextualise the increasing levels of militarisation developed across the Ksamil Peninsula as a border area. As similar evolutions can be considered to have occurred elsewhere along Albania’s borders, this aspect is not covered within the Drino Valley case study.

The manufacture, installation, and psychology of MSBs on the Ksamil Peninsula were examined through military and civilian interactions which occurred after the establishment of Ksamil town. Unlike the Drino Valley, the people inhabiting the Ksamil Peninsula are mostly internal migrants who were moved there under communism. These transfers were semi-voluntary, although only people loyal to the Party would have been considered to live near the border. Many of Ksamil’s families still consider their roots to be in their origin towns which has created a disjointed sense of connection to the peninsula landscape, although this is changing as time moves forward.

The post-communist landscape of Ksamil, its touristic development and physical impact on MSBs has been explored, as has their re-use and decoration which inadvertently created a shift in perception as time passed. The pre-MSB landscape investigation is not reflected by
Figure 29: Map of Ksamil Peninsula study area with names of places mentioned in text (© author)
similar research in the Drino Valley case study (see Chapter 5), which will focus on production, installation and the MSB as an object for tourism while exploring processes of MSB destruction.

**Geographical and Historical Background**

The hilly ridge of the Ksamil Peninsula lies between the Ionian Sea and Lake Butrint with the Vivari River Channel flowing between the two. The topology and position of this area caused it to become increasingly militarised across the communist period with defensive and observational facilities (see below). The earliest evidence of human activity on the peninsula stretches back 50,000 years to the Middle Palaeolithic (Korkuti 2003: 211), but no full settlement occurred until the ancient Hellenistic, Roman then Late Antique city of Butrint was established. Sites connected to Butrint, such as small villas or burials, have been identified on the peninsula hills, but do not indicate any great scale of settlement (Crowson 2004). This was because the Roman expansion of Butrint focused away from the peninsula hills towards the flat lands of the Vrinë Plain (e.g. Greenslade 2019), which could facilitate a gridded town plan and was more suited to a seafaring economy.

Butrint was strategically located and almost fully surrounded by water which provided a natural element of defence. The architecture of this city was historically designed and redesigned over successive civilisations with solid walls, towers and gateways for additional protection and control of people-movement. The communist defence strategy did not include any bunkers or military infrastructure within the archaeological site boundary. Instead, the surrounding area was fortified with MSBs, trenches, an army base, and heavy anti-aircraft artillery tunnels on Mount Sotir above Butrint (Figure 30).

The communist regime had no heritage concerns in positioning military infrastructure into archaeological environments, as demonstrated by bunker installations at ancient Phoenice and Apollonia. These examples are strategic locations with wide vistas which suited the communist military tactic of observation, whereas Butrint itself was low-lying. The dearth of MSBs at Butrint reflects therefore how warfare and military technologies have evolved towards twentieth century conflict, rather than being a demonstration of historical safeguarding.
Away from Butrint, the hilltops of the Ksamil Peninsula were developed during the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries by Venetian settlements associated with fisheries, timber, and salt industries along the Vivari Channel. Between 1798–1804 the area was seized by Ali Pasha of Ioannina as part of the Ottoman Empire. He reduced long-established trade links with Corfu by closing the Vivari Channel and redirected the economy inwards and overland towards Delvinë (Carvajal López et al 2011: 1; Hodges 2016: 46). Trade between Butrint and Corfu did continue, but on a much-reduced scale which caused settlements on the Ksamil Peninsula to decline on the edge of the Ottoman Empire. This situation was largely maintained until 1966 when the communist government created Ksamil town. Venetian and Ottoman patterns on the Ksamil Peninsula were surveyed by a Butrint Foundation archaeological team who examined the highest hill, known as ‘Coperta’ (Carvajal López et al 2011: 1).

By 1972, an Army Observation Unit Base had been established on Coperta hilltop which demonstrates its strategic re-use for monitoring the surrounding landscape. It holds clear views
of Corfu, the mouth of the Vivari Channel, coastlines, and maritime traffic (Figure 31). Through my field investigations around Coperta and on-site discussions with the Butrint Foundation survey team leader, Dr José Carvajal López, it seems that most Venetian and Ottoman building material was re-used during communism. This convenient source of stone was used to construct military buildings, body walls and flanks for Type 2 and 4 MSBs, and communication trench revetments (see below).

Today, the Ksamil Peninsula is situated within the current zoning of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint as part of its National Park environs. The less inhabited southern part near Butrint is mostly designated as A2: Natural Subzone, with the northern part and Ksamil town designated as B: Recreational Zone. Since the mid-2000s, the town has increasingly developed economically as a seaside tourist destination which has impacted MSBs in ways which will be explored below.

Figure 31: Army Observation Unit Base on Coperta hilltop overlooking Corfu, Ksamil Peninsula, 2017 (© author)
Research Overview

The maritime Cold War division between East and West could be monitored from the Ksamil Peninsula and controls imposed upon any exterior military threat or subversive influences. After the Second World War, the Ksamil Peninsula was fortified with defensive structures, assisted by Yugoslavians then Soviets, and from the early 1950s was designated a restricted militarised zone within a national landscape reorganisation which closed the whole coastline for security reasons (CIA 1952c: 3).

At this time, the town of Ksamil had not been established, but further southeast near the land border with Greece the CIA reported on extreme repressive measures taken against people living around Konispol. During July 1951, at least 30 families were removed and relocated to the interior, an action described as ‘routine government measures to maintain security control’ (CIA 1951a: 1). Over the following year, this land border zone was thoroughly purged by breaking up several principal families, installing Sigurimi (Secret Police) detachments and increasing border guard numbers. The CIA reported that within this context, the West’s ability to influence any conspiracy within small communities would have been impossible (CIA 1952a: 1, 1952b: 1).

From the late 1960s, centralised control over the Ksamil Peninsula was reified by the installation of MSBs. The earliest installations were Type 4 MSBs, attached to stone-lined trenches and positioned intermittently across the peninsula. After a more extensive plan was initiated from 1973, Type 2 MSBs were installed, followed by Type 1 and Type 3 MSBs, which intensified as relations deteriorated with China prior to their 1978 split. No Type 5 MSBs were recorded on the Ksamil Peninsula but some have been observed further southeast during fieldwalking on hills closer to the Greek land border.

The military history, materialities and narratives of MSBs were investigated by fieldwork across the Ksamil Peninsula, with additional walkover surveys and oral research conducted in the broader Sarandë region. Figure 32 highlights places mentioned in this chapter, notably the MSB producing Vrion concrete factory and areas of militarisation around Sarandë town. A military specialist (IN-12, 13.10.18) was interviewed about his former role as the Commandant in charge of the Ksamil Military Company (1973–1977) and his subsequent MSB work in the wider Sarandë region. This interview yielded significant information on military strategy as well as the planning,
Figure 32: Map showing study locations across wider Sarandë region (© author)
installation, and ongoing monitoring of MSBs. The timeframe of his work in Ksamil is important as it covers the period leading towards Albania’s break with China, the 1974 purge of the Beqir Balluku group (see Chapter 3) and the installation of Type 1, 2 and 3 MSBs on the peninsula (see below).

Further interviews were undertaken with Hismet Osmani (HO, 14.04.17) and Perparim Ahmeti (PA, 13.04.17) from Ksamil. Both were teenagers when they moved to Ksamil in the early-mid 1970s to attend a practical school for working on the local state farm. At age 18, they were conscripted for two years national service in the Ksamil and Sarandë area. They spent their military service working on aspects of the bunkerisation programme spanning the period 1977–1983. HO continued within the military and PA became a reservist. Both interviews provided personal daily lived experiences of the local landscape and were selected because their experience covers aspects of MSB installations from the end of relations with China and the start of isolation for Albania.

Ksamil residents of varying ages were interviewed who offered non-military MSB engagement information during and after communism. Albanians who originated from elsewhere but made visits to Ksamil after 1991 were interviewed to gain their perspectives on the peninsula’s militarised landscape. An interview was conducted with Sotir Marjani (SM, 15.04.17) at the Vrion concrete factory where he had been Chief of Planning from 1987–88 and subsequently, the Director of Construction. On site, he explained how the different zones, buildings, machines, and platforms had functioned under communism. Following this, an interview was conducted with Tahir Sulejmani (TS, 15.04.17), a former concrete and metalworker at Vrion from 1976–1982.

Communist Reordering of the Peninsula Landscape

Defences Prior to MSBs and Ksamil Town: 1945–1967

In November 1947, the CIA reported the existence of first-line fortifications along the Albanian coast running south from Vlorë, via Borsh to Butrint (CIA 1947: 1). As an example of post-Second World War landscape militarisation in this region, the CIA described installations
around the Greek border crossing point of Konispol as: road obstacles and barricades, anti-tank trenches and pillboxes along with artillery, mortar, and machine gun emplacements. These works were conducted under a mixed Soviet-Yugoslav-Albanian commission, directed by Soviet engineers with materials and some labour supplied by Yugoslavia (ibid.). Trench fortifications and occasional gun emplacements were also built across hills that overlooked the Sarandë to Konispol road to the east of Lake Butrint, and preparations were underway for an air base close to the lake (CIA 1948a: 1), presumably on the flat lands of the Vrinë Plain.

These joint works continued until diplomatic relations between Albania and Yugoslavia broke down and, in July 1948, Tiranë finally expelled all Yugoslav advisers. In 1949, Albania joined the COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) and made trade agreements with other USSR countries (Zickel and Iwaskiw 1994: 44). As the COMECON agreements required the draining of the Vrinë area for agricultural use to create exports, this would explain, along with the switch of allegiance to the USSR, why the Butrint air base was not completed.

Most of Albania’s joint 1947–1948 military works with Yugoslavia on the Ksamil Peninsula were rapid-response defensive installations designed to cover as much landscape as possible but leave little trace today. In 1951 the CIA reported that an artillery emplacement, armed with one cannon and an anti-aircraft machine-gun, had been observed in the woods of Ksamil, 0.6km from the shoreline (CIA 1951b: 1). This was potentially a Yugoslav-period construction but, with scant location data attached, it has proved impossible to identify, if indeed it still exists. The more solid constructions from this period are still in evidence, such as the Army Radar Base built on one of the southwest hills overlooking the closest crossing point to Corfu and a small military base established at the mouth of the Vivari Channel. The unit at the Vivari base was located directly opposite the remains of an eighteenth-century Venetian-Ottoman fortress known as the Castle of Ali Pasha; the substantial remains of which were militarily reoccupied during communism.

In 2009 I observed physical evidence of communist use of the castle during a Butrint Foundation survey (Crowson 2009: 21–22). Some rooms had been repaired and internally rendered as waterproofing, long-drops cleared, walls broken through for shielded observation or firing, metal-spiked gun mounts driven into window ledges and artillery platforms installed upon one of the forward-facing towers (Figure 33). Further work undertaken by the Butrint Foundation was able to define two distinct phases of communist reoccupation: first from the
1940s–1960s and second from the 1970s, the latter being a more determined effort due to Albania’s increased fear of an imminent invasion (Carvajal López and Palanco 2013: 301). The communist re-use of this fortress, with its commanding views of the Corfu Straits and positional ability to protect the Vivari Channel, reinforced Ali Pasha’s historical-period shunning of the world beyond the borderline and illustrates how important historic defensive locations in the landscape can be temporally re-engaged.

As the Ksamil Peninsula was a controlled military zone, a checkpoint called Manastir was installed in the 1950s at the narrowest span of the peninsula at Demë. At this time, this area was accessed by a minor track-road from Sarandë, and permits were required to pass along it. This road was upgraded and extended towards Butrint in 1959, an endeavour that is widely reported as being undertaken for Nikita Khrushchev and Soviet Defence Minister, Marshall Malinovsky’s visit to the site of Butrint (Hodges 2009: 24). Prior to this meeting,
the Vrinë Plain area from Mursi to Cape Stilo was altered by the communist government through river diversion, drainage and irrigation works to create arable farmland.

The CIA reported on these works and noted that the new road from Sarandë towards the Demë checkpoint would be extended as far as Butrint to serve the newly planned Vrinë State Farm (CIA 1958: 33). The middle section of this CIA report was redacted; therefore, it may have potentially contained information correlating the new road with Khrushchev’s visit. According to Dalakoglou, communist Albanian roadbuilding had connected remote corners of Albania, such as the far south, and these material entities served to impose a new centralised national identity onto people whose lives had previously been governed by regional systems (2012: 577, 584). Whatever the reasoning for its construction, the new Sarandë to Butrint road became an essential controlled route that facilitated an increased level of peninsula militarisation and the development of Ksamil town.

Communist military and civilian lives became interwoven after 1966 when workers were brought to Ksamil through controlled internal mobilisation for the fourth five-year (1966–70) agricultural plan. They set out to hand-terrace roughly 50km of coastal hills from Ksamil northwards to Lukovë to grow fruits and vegetables for cooperative state farms, which for this study area was located at Stjar, near Sarandë (Hall 1984: 546). The degree to which this landscape was reordered through agriculture means that most, if not all, of the late-1940s Yugoslav-assisted fortifications must have been eradicated. These comprised hastily constructed slit trenches without revetments, occasional mortar and machine gun emplacements, pillboxes, and barbed wire barricades (CIA 1947: 1, 1948b: 2, 1950: 128) and were transient impacts on the landscape rather than more permanent impositions.

This early communist landscape appears relatively small-scale in comparison to the later network developed after the 1961 Sino-Albanian alliance (see below). During walkover surveys of the peninsula, no obvious evidence of early fortifications was found and conversations with local people did not yield any memory of their presence or potential locations. The lack of local recollection is not necessarily surprising considering that Ksamil was settled relatively recently and most of its inhabitants moved there at least two decades after the close of Albanian-Yugoslavian relations.

It is possible that non-terraced areas of the peninsula, such as steeper hillsides and military zones, could hold remnants of Yugoslav-assisted trenches which were subsequently
re-cut or incorporated into new defences. The lack of extant visual evidence or social memory means that the concealed nature of these transient trenches could only be confirmed through detailed archaeological survey and excavation. This illustrates how conflict landscapes are palimpsests of physical and social action over time. Unlike earlier twentieth century conflicts, the Cold War was an extremely long, drawn out multi-episodic experience comprising ‘hot’ and ‘cold’ socio-political encounters. This period was noted as leaving material traces of action or non-events within the landscape, including positions where soldiers waited for invasions, that in places like Albania, never came (Schofield et al 2002b: 4). Albania’s Cold War experience is marked by differing alliances, each of which made distinct impacts on the landscape, with only some visually evident today.

*Trenches, Tunnels and Early MSBs on the Ksamil Peninsula: 1965–1973*

The socio-political circumstances leading to the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia created a renewed Albanian determination to safeguard the coastal border with subterranean tunnels, trenches, and Type 4 MSBs. From 1967–1972, the southern end of the Ksamil Peninsula was fortified by the heavy anti-aircraft battery at Mount Sotir with two similar positions installed to the north, near Manastir. These comprised four inter-connected artillery tunnels with heavy long-range weapons, such as Mitraloz anti-aircraft guns, and were attached to the Sarandë coastal defence battalion (IN-12, 13.10.18). At least four other subterranean tunnels were built into the peninsula hills by national service conscripts, reservists, and local people overseen by military personnel. These jobs operated over three eight-hour shifts per day and people rotated after working five days in a row (IN-12, 13.10.18). This enabled a 24-hour operation, a common operational tactic utilised under communism for priority projects such as defence.

Trenches close to army bases or as communication lines for Type 4 MSBs were well-revetted with mortared stone walls to depths of up to 2m (Figure 34). Such revetment walls were also noted with early Type 2 MSBs installations (Figure 35) and is a feature of the late-1960s to early-1970s when more time and/or labour was available to dress stone from tunnelling or collect ruined building material. Subsequent Type 2 and Type 1 MSBs had trenches of bare edges or used unworked stone bonded with earth (Figure 36).
Figure 34: Deep stone-revetted trench lines near Coperta hilltop, Ksamil Peninsula, 2010 (© author)

Figure 35: Early Type 2 MSBs with stone-revetted rear trenches, Ksamil Peninsula coastline, 2008 (© author)
The stone-revetted trenches on Coperta hill were first explored for this research during a 2010 walkover survey and comprised inbuilt firing-step positions (Figure 37) with two Type 4 MSBs. The northern limit of this trench has ‘Ksamil’, a date and person’s name scored into the mortar wall-top capping (Figure 38). This marks the trench completion date as 21st March 1968, by a man called Hazbi Seriani, who had contributed towards solidifying Albania’s homeland defence. As decreed by Party doctrine, he had fulfilled his role as a New-Man of the New-Albania and felt the need to document his dutiful work by way of an inscription.

This mix of person with materials from that time has created an invested social identity.
within this communist material culture. It has a time-framed identity that spans a memory bridge to exemplify the concept of people within objects and the agency distributed in the casual milieu (Gell 1998: 20). Within a regime which heavily promoted the collective above the individual (except when it suited ideology), it is curious that painted or etched graffiti containing names, initials, dates, or origin town were not uncommon. Additional examples from Ksamil MSB interiors will be discussed below.

Figure 37: Firing-step built into communication trench near Coperta hill, Ksamil Peninsula, 2010 (© author)
Prior to the 1972 completion of the Ksamil Observation Unit Base, a late 1960s tunnel complex was built inside the Coperta hilltop and was partially explored, mapped, and photographed in 2017 as part of this research. Three hillside tunnel entrances led into the complex from the stone-revetted trenches explored in 2010. The rear Ksamil entrance is blocked with in-washed soils and could therefore hold some interesting excavation potential (Figure 39).

The Corfu facing entrance and external trench are easily accessible (Figure 40), whereas elsewhere it is overgrown with thorny vegetation. For reasons of health and safety this tunnel was only entered for 10m with local resident Arvid Dervishi (AD), who had explored the tunnels previously. He explained that the straight entrance tunnels all join to an interior curvilinear one with individual chambers along the rear, serving as protection from potential bombardment (AD, 14.04.17). The inside face of the tunnel is lined with shuttered concrete for about 4m (Figure 41), after which it remained as bare quarried rock.
Figure 39: Infilled rear entrance to tunnel complex below Coperta hill, Ksamil Peninsula, 2017 (© author)

Figure 40: Corfu facing entrance to tunnels below Coperta hill, during fieldwork, Ksamil Peninsula, 2017 (© author)
The extensive trench network on the Ksamil Peninsula connected hilltop military positions with coastline, town, and roads. It was regularly used for anti-invasion practice drills (‘kushtrim’) by civilian reservists and soldiers. One local interviewee, Perparim Ahmeti, remembered training across trench systems near the Army Radar Base during his 1981–1983 national service. This involved practice shooting from camouflaged trenches against stationary or moving targets and anti-invasion manoeuvres where one group played the enemy role, usually Greeks, who were repelled by the Albanian team using the trenches for cover (PA, 13.04.17).

Over these same years, AD’s father was conscripted to the Ksamil border guards and for part of his training he needed to travel fully equipped from one peninsula position to another within a specified timeframe. He ran through the trenches to achieve this as they were the quickest way to cross the landscape (AD, 14.04.17). Within the unprecedented freedom to
roam that existed by the mid-1990s, AD used the stories of his father to explore those same trenches and MSBs for himself. These memories combined with AD’s own experiences provided him with an insightful local militarised knowledge, which proved useful for our discussions and walkovers.

The scale of the Ksamil Peninsula trench landscape can be explained in part through official defence strategy, but also through the tactic of trench digging as a common training exercise for soldiers, reservists, military conscripts, and high school children (IN-12, 13.10.18). The use of high school children for defensive works was confirmed in an interview with a former teacher within the Librazhdi District, bordering what is now North Macedonia. From 1974 to 1978 this teacher took pupils aged 16–19 to the valley highlands on Sundays to dig trenches in preparation for MSB installations. He recalled that much work was required as this area was close to Yugoslavia and it was difficult as the steep terrain and lack of roads meant all tools were carried up by hand (IN-1, 23.06.08). This was a compulsory ideological education which linked the school with the army to instil a war mentality within students who were close to undertaking national service.

Militarised education using schoolchildren for landscape works continued for the rest of the communist period as a form of free labour for nationalist projects. During the late 1980s, when Bledar Goxharaj was 12–14 years old his school class spent a week each summer in the Sarandë hills cleaning out military trenches and weeding a 2m buffer zone either side (BG, 15.04.17). On the Ksamil Peninsula, people of all ages volunteered to clean out MSBs and trenches as it was considered a duty of New-Albanian citizens to always be ready and such works demonstrated loyalty to the Party (MÇ, 11.04.17).

During Ksamil Peninsula fieldwork, 11 Type 4 MSBs of the 65 identified were investigated and found to contain very few prefabricated concrete elements. Body walls were made from stone and/or shuttered poured concrete, which created a more angular interior than the curves of later prefabricated MSB elements (Figure 42). Type 4 MSB tops were either covered by earth or a thick layer of coarse poured concrete (Figure 43) with angled frontal flanks constructed on either side of the embrasure (Figure 44). The relatively small amount of steel within Type 4 MSBs means that most installations on the peninsula were ignored by people undertaking metal extraction works. However, where Type 4 MSBs have been in the way of developments around Ksamil, they have been buried or crushed for removal.
Figure 42: Shuttered concrete angular interior of Type 4 MSB Ksamil Peninsula coastline, 2008 (© author)

Figure 43: Type 4 MSB with poured concrete cap opposite Corfu, Army Observation Unit Base, Coperta hill, Ksamil Peninsula, 2017 (© author)
An example of removal for economic progress was observed in 2008 where landscaping works for a new Ksamil promenade had exposed a Type 4 MSB and its rear stone-lined trench. This MSB had been scraped down by a machine bucket which had broken away the stone flanking walls but left the main structure essentially intact. The rear tunnel contained the initials HC above Sh, with 70–7 at the base, finger-pressed into the setting concrete. HC represents the name of someone who was able to access the MSB and add their personality when the render was still soft during July 1970. Sh represents Shkodër, a city in the far north of Albania, meaning this is a material example of communist mobility practice. People doing military border works, such as guards, were sent away from home locations to prevent their being compromised by people they knew (Vullnetari and King 2014: 127). The motivations for HC documenting their presence are unknown and possibilities are discussed with additional examples below, but this case could have represented a longing for home and family, distanced by 360km on modern roads.
This Type 4 MSB was eventually broken up, but its location is marked by a wider section of the promenade walkway where the MSB once stood. In addition, the communist trench revetment was maintained behind the new promenade wall to retain the hillside (Figure 45). This unintended act of preservation illustrates how the communist materiality of architectural relics can evolve as their role becomes reconfigured within a transitioning Albania. Once designed as a resistance against foreigners, this MSB symbolised a nationalist xenophobia, but now (in part) supports infrastructure for tourists and visiting Albanians who are free to move within in their own country.

Figure 45: Type 4 MSB exposed by Ksamil promenade landscaping and widened walkway with retention of trench wall, Ksamil Peninsula, 2008 and 2010 (© author)

Prefabricated MSB Production at the Vrion Concrete Factory: 1974–1989

Many MSBs on the Ksamil Peninsula were produced at a concrete factory in the village of Vrion near Sarandë. These were identified during fieldwork by a regional factory stamp of ‘SR’ followed by the month and year of production imprinted on prefabricated MSB buffer pieces. This factory opened in 1974 and was called ‘The Construction Enterprise of Manufacturing Building Materials’ (Ndërmarrja e Prodhim Materiale Ndërtimit) but was widely known as ‘Poligon’ (butts) due to an adjacent practice shooting range.
MSB production at Vrion concluded in 1989, four years later than at the Gjirokastër concrete factory (see Chapter 5) and by 1996 had been purchased from the government for US$3,000 by the former director Sotir Marjani (SM). The democratic Albanian government had abandoned former Stalinist ideology and enacted a new economy improvement law to facilitate the transition of state enterprises into private businesses (Zickel and Iwaskiw 1994: 120). Production ceased completely in 2010 and the factory is now disused with a former worker as a security guard (Figure 46).

Figure 46: Vrion concrete factory, Sarandë region, 2017 (© author)

Prior to the opening of the Vrion enterprise, prefabricated concrete elements for Type 2 MSBs, air raid shelters and other defensive constructions were transported to the Ksamil Peninsula from the nearest concrete factories at Gjirokastër and Fier (PA, 13.04.17). At that time, reinforced concrete elements were relatively modest in size and weight so could be easier transported by trucks. After the implementation of the 1972 bunkerisation plan, the Tiranë
Central Planning Committee constructed the Vrion facility for ease of supplying the southern coastal border with prefabricated MSB elements. This was particularly important for Type 1 MSBs as these had heavier components and were more difficult to transport. The new factory at Vrion was intended to reduce fuel costs, improve distribution, and speed up MSB installation.

Tahir Sulejmani (TS) started work with the concrete mixing section at Vrion in 1976 and moved onto metalwork, forming steel rebar meshes for MSBs. During the factory visit we explored the metalwork building where TS had worked, which is now in a poor state with faint red traces of a Party slogan on the exterior (Figure 47). Inside, two long workbenches with rebar bending and cutting machines at each end are still evident (Figure 48).

TS was one of 300 employees at the Vrion factory, which operated over three shifts of eight hours each to enable the 24-hour working pattern mentioned earlier. This confirms findings by photographer Robert Hackman who visited Vrion in the late 2000s for his ‘Bunker Albania’ project (www.robhackman.com). Hackman’s interview with a former factory worker
revealed that the three-shift process for MSBs not only increased production, but it also meant that no person would know the full MSB design plan as each shift produced different parts (R. Hackman 2016, pers. comm. 4 April).

State design plans and daily production targets for MSBs were sent to the Vrion factory from the Tiranë Institute of Projects. These designs included steel rebar meshes for bunker caps, sides, and tunnel elements as well as for embrasures, brackets and supports. These papers were classified as top secret and it was SM’s responsibility to remove and return documents containing work orders from his safe at the start and close of each shift. He would distribute them to the foreperson of each team, whose group would focus solely on the tasks detailed within their documents.

Discussion between workers in different teams was not permitted, a controlling attitude evident in most aspects of communist life, but within the MSB programme it
encapsulated the paranoia of the leadership. SM recalled that some of the most confidential information from Tiranë related to the designs of steel reinforcements and fittings for prefabricated MSB elements, particularly that of the cap (SM, 15.04.17). The 2008 fieldwork survey of Ksamil recorded the steel meshwork within a Type 1 MSB cap that had been left exposed after a breaking attempt had removed the surrounding concrete (Figure 49). This partially broken MSB cap makes visible one of the most hidden defensive secrets of the former regime.

Instructions from Tiranë also detailed how MSB materials and components were prepared through to manufacture of a high-quality final product. TS acknowledged there were strict rules in operation at Vrion and remembered that when he was mixing concrete, if the sands and gravels had not been washed thoroughly, they were not supposed to be used (TS, 15.04.17). According to SM, any tampering of MSB ingredients or changes to the design were regarded as serious sabotage and could result in culprits going to jail. He recalled an incident
at Vrion when the gravel stockpile for mixing MSB concrete had run out, and so to fulfil their
daily work target they used local river gravels instead.

Within the context of communist Albania’s informer culture, a letter was written by
persons unknown which notified the Tiranë authorities of this deviation, and a group of
inspectors arrived at Vrion. SM said he was relieved that this incident occurred in the late-
1980s, because aspects of the system had become less strict after Hoxha’s death, meaning he
was reprimanded rather than detained by the authorities (SM, 15.04.17). The degree to which
the state regulated people’s work and personal lives was so acute that even gravels had
become politicised.

According to SM, Vrion supplied MSB elements across Vlorë County, from the southern
land and sea borders with Greece northwards to the coastal area of Borsh. He estimated that
they made 20–40 complete Type 1 MSBs per month, but that this depended on what was
contained in the work orders from Tiranë. Type 1 MSB elements would remain in their moulds
for five or six days, then be sprung and left to set for roughly 20 days, meaning it took around 26
days for each piece to be ready, depending on size (SM, 15.04.17).

When production declined after Hoxha’s death, Vrion was maintained as one of three
MSB manufacturing facilities in Albania, along with Peqin near Elbasan and the Josif Pashko
Factory at Laprakë in Tiranë. These remaining MSB producing locations are in the southern half
of Albania, which reflects the territorial vulnerability of the post-Hoxha leadership towards
their Italian and Greek neighbours, whereas relations with Yugoslavia, bordering the north,
had improved

After the collapse of communism, SM recalled that manufacture of all concrete
products was halted as there was no longer an Albanian state to administer the factory, and
no-one to pay any wages. During the subsequent chaotic breakdown of society, people stole
equipment, metal, and concrete pieces from the Vrion factory. This included a stockpile of MSB
parts, which were recycled for use within new construction projects (SM, 15.04.17). As of 2017,
only a single Type 1 MSB cap mould remains at Vrion. It is formed of 20mm thick steel with a
diameter of 2.75m to a height of 0.65m and has been repurposed as a water container (Figure
50), a common re-use for cap moulds which was also observed in the Drino Valley.
The Limani Restaurant in Sarandë is sited on a platform protruding out across the waterfront on foundations composed of numerous, but now invisible, MSB elements. In the early 1990s, a teenage Sindorela Golemi saw this pile of MSB elements in the water and recalled to me how she had thought it a very strange sight (2018, pers. comm. 15 December). There is no doubt that seeing such MSB elements out of context and discarded would have looked absurd as these had once been considered Albania’s strongest weapon against an invasion.

During the late 1990s, seaward expansions by new businesses continued along the Sarandë shoreline and were witnessed by archaeologists working at Butrint (1998–2000) who remembered seeing MSBs moved by cranes to positions along the coast, including Club Iguana, as solid foundations on which to build (J. O’Dwyer 2018, pers. comm. 13 October; O. Gilkes 2018, pers. comm. 8 November; W. Bowden 2019 pers. comm. 3 January). In 2009, this practice was observed by Robert Hackman who photographed MSB cap halves as a foundation.
revetment of another Sarandë beachfront expansion (Figure 51), indicating that this practice was a near twenty-year-old distinctive but also reliable method of construction.

Later MSBs in the Ksamil Peninsula Landscape: 1973–1989

The installation of Type 1, 2 and 3 MSBs on the Ksamil Peninsula demonstrate how the bunkerisation process became more standardised. Within the central planning system of communist Albania, it is therefore likely that that these results reflect an approach that was typical across the country. From 1973, Type 2 MSBs were installed on the peninsula, followed by Types 1 and 3 from 1977. The priority had been to mount MSB lines along coastal areas such as Ksamil, then move inland through the wider Sarandë region to defend roads, hills, and significant positions.

Within the 2008 Ksamil fieldwork, I observed completion dates scored into finishing render of coastal Type 1 MSB tunnels, ranging from September 1977 to February 1979, covering Albania’s 1978 split with China. The former Commandant in charge of the Ksamil
Military Company (IN-12) explained to me the triple-layered process for MSB work on the Ksamil peninsula. First, a Government Study Group would decide on the capacity of an area by examining its topography to judge how many MSBs were required and where. Second, the sector responsible for breaking ground would follow the plans set out by the Government Study Group. The third phase involved a review, then mounting of MSBs could commence.

The Study Group comprised up to five officers and included specialists in tactics, defence, and weapons. Each MSB had a unique number which was recorded on individual passport cards (Kartela), or Booklet for Fire Centre (Librezë per Qendër Zjarri). These documented the intended position with names and signatures of those in the Study Group, some of whom participated in the mounting to ensure the MSB viewshed was positioned correctly. All work was checked off with names to enable accountability and therefore if anything were amiss, blame could be directed towards the officer responsible (IN-12, 13.10.18).

In Ksamil, the location planning of MSBs is reflected by red painted numbers on interior body walls. All MSBs contain the figure 90, believed to represent the landscape division number, below either 12 in the northern half, or 13 for the southern half of the peninsula. Adjacent to this is an additional painted number unique to each installation which is believed to be the passport number (Figure 52). Within the context of centralised planning over all aspects of life, it is interesting to note that the government similarly issued internal passports to Albanian citizens as a method of controlling the movement of people from rural to urban locations (Mëhilli, 2017: 165), which further blurs the line between the treatment of people and MSBs.

The second stage of the MSB programme was experienced by Hismet Osmani from 1979–1989 when he worked as an explosives specialist on the Ksamil Peninsula. His main job entailed blowing bedrock with explosives to open trenches and MSB holes. He explained how it was risky physical work, but psychologically he considered it like being a soldier in combat where he needed to clear his mind and focus. He worked with two assistants laying out 20–30 charges at a time and HO was responsible for marking the area as safe with a red flag once all the mines had gone off. HO admitted there had been difficulties and risks to his life, but he enjoyed the danger aspect and as under communism everybody had to do a job, he felt at peace with this one (HO, 14.04.17).
The third phase review process of MSB installation was recalled by IN-12 as being where any changes to the original plan were detailed and signed off on the passport. This revision process is evident in Ksamil where preparation pits had been dug along trench lines, but ultimately no MBSs were mounted (Figure 53). This is also reflected by the installation of Type 1 MSBs as single or double positions rather than the more typical Garnizon-3 seen along the coastline. IN-12 explained that this was for topological reasons related to communist military strategy whereby the crossover of MSB viewsheds on Albanian ground was prohibited. This meant mountings would not be completed where existing cover was already provided (IN-12, 13.10.18). The many corrugations, coves and five small islands along the Ksamil coastline may have proved a challenge for the reviewing group and, as mispositioning MSBs was considered sabotage, it appears that those responsible erred on the side of caution.
The mounting of MSBs was undertaken by ‘Sapper’ unit members with assistance from reservists and volunteer workers. From 1977–1979 HO spent some of his national service installing Type 2 MSBs on the remote hilly coastal area of Cape Stilo, south of the peninsula opposite Corfu. HO explained that road access from the Vrinë Plain was poor, therefore the prefabricated elements needed to be carried by hand to their mounting locations (HO, 14.04.17).

Type 1 MSBs were more problematic in terms of their maneuverability. This was witnessed by PA when he drove trucks as a reservist for a Type 1 MSB installation group based in the village of Shkallë, 13km southeast of Butrint. The team were positioning MSBs on Mount Milë and PA remembered that each six-person squad had a daily target to move four elements over the 10km distance from village to mountain. MSB pieces were taken most of the way using trucks with cranes attached, but beyond this, animals, wooden poles, and brute force were the only way to get parts into position. He recalled seeing a lot of accidents, especially when the
heavy weight of MSB elements caused soldiers to slip and on occasion break their legs. Seeing people get lifelong injuries was one reason why PA continues to be grateful that he did not have to move MSB parts himself (PA, 13.04.17).

According to the former Commandant of the Ksamil Military Company (IN-12), finalised MSB position maps and numbers were reported to the Ministry of Defence in Tiranë, whereas passports were only held locally. IN-12 told me his MSB passports had been stored in a highly secret place and, with no copies apparently held elsewhere, I would be unlikely to discover them. He recalled an incident when he ‘lost’ an MSB during an official check in 1977 by a Ministry of Defence Officer from Tiranë. They had cross-referenced all but one MSB against passport documentation in the Sarandë region. The officer demanded to know the location of this missing MSB, and the Commandant began to worry that he would be reprimanded or jailed for being incompetent. Eventually, a stressed IN-12 worked out it was an MSB at Dërmish, 8km east of Sarandë, which had been installed low in the landscape with its embrasure close to the mountain face. He recalled how relieved he felt once after this MSB passport was finally signed off as he had considered himself a diligent citizen who did not want a stain on his record (IN-12, 13.10.18).

Weapons tests on Type 1 MSBs were performed to check that prefabricated elements were being manufactured correctly with the requisite quantity and quality of concrete and steel. For the Sarandë region this occurred in the Rusan Hills, roughly 16km north of the Vrion factory near the village of Palavli. In 2009 Rob Hackman interviewed Alfred Moisiu, the former Chief of Engineering and Fortifications of the Ministry of Defence (1971–1981). Moisiu is informally known as the main bunkerisation architect of Albania and explained to Hackman that to test the effect of heavy artillery on MSBs, animals were put inside prior to bombardment and checked by veterinary specialists afterwards. Border patrol dogs were included because they were well-trained and considered more intelligent than other animals (Hackman 2019: 69). While researching Albania’s MSBs I have heard many stories about bunker testing where goats, sheep, cows, cats, or rabbits were used as well as dogs. Only once have I been told that an animal died — it was a rabbit (IN-2, 24.06.08).

The Palavli MSB testing was attended by IN-12 in 1978 as part of his military duties. The Battalion of the Sarandë region fired light and heavy artillery at Type 1 MSBs and the caps were given direct hits to study how different munitions ricocheted off. In addition, the ground area
around installations was also bombarded to see if the structure would be buried or affected by near-misses. After bombardment, IN-12 examined the MSBs and recalled seeing that damage was only superficial with small chips of concrete missing (IN-12, 13.10.18).

These tests were heard, but not seen by PA in 1982 while constructing munitions tunnels on the Metoq hills, behind Sarandë. He recalled that the blasts lasted for seven consecutive days and it sounded extremely loud, even from 15km away (PA, 13.04.17). Classen identifies bombardment as a key sensory experience of war, and that such conflict creates a confusion of the senses for combatants and civilian inhabitants (Classen 2014: 20). In the case of Albania, on a war-footing without fighting, it could be argued that once a strong MSB formula had been developed, further testing was unnecessary. However, there is no doubt that the noise generated was also intended as a nationalistic aural assault on the population which reminded people of two things: Albania could be invaded at any moment and that the leadership was ready.

One way for military personnel to counteract the psychological anxiety and daily life constraints imposed by the leadership was through graffiti. This enabled a person to assert themselves and their role by documenting their individuality within a collective society. Explicit evidence of such behaviour has been observed within Ksamil’s MSBs, for example:

- In July 1985 Soldier G. Myrtaj from Fieri scratched inside a Type 1 MSB: ‘This will be unforgettable in my life’ (Korik 1985 — kjo dhe do mbetet e paharruar në jëten time, Ushtarare, G. Myrtaj, nga Fieri) (Figure 54).
- Soldier L. Agolli from Qyteti Stalin (Stalin City, restored to its original name of Kuçovë in 1991) used red paint to list his 1986–88 service.
- Soldier A. Molishti of Berat used red paint to list 1986–88 service (Figure 55).
- Soldier Luan Domi, a soldier from the Vorri Bomit area of Tiranë used red paint to record his presence in two MSBs, but without a date.

It is worth noting that no dates earlier than 1985 were found in personalised MSB graffiti, which could reflect an easing of restrictions within the army after the death of Hoxha.
Fieldwork at the Ksamil Army Observation Unit Base noted graffiti with mid-1990s dates alongside several names and initials either painted or chiselled onto the external caps of Type 1 and 4 MSBs overlooking Corfu (Figure 56). Chipping into concrete was a far more blatant and time-consuming approach than painting, but within the innocuous context of Albania’s transition years it reflects the boredom and rebellious freedom felt by soldiers.

A Ksamil businessman confirmed the post-communist continuation of soldiers writing in bunkers and recalled his own 1994 experience when stationed near Vlorë to the north on national service. He explained that this graffiti was done to document one’s own presence and experience, but also acted as a message to future soldiers. In his opinion, seeing names, dates and the origin town of others who had been in the same position and doing the same work would have an emotional impact on the soldier (IN-5, 26.06.08). This person-to-object connection would have resonated by providing the soldier with a link to home and made the MSB feel more personal within the collectivised notion of military life. In this way, the MSB was
a container which acted beyond any conventional military use. It was a communicator between generations of soldiers on national service who utilised it to share communist and post-communist experiences.

Figure 55: Red painted graffiti within Type 1 MSB by soldier A. Molishti, Ksamil Peninsula, 2017 (© author)
Civilian residents of Ksamil were provided with subterranean air raid shelters installed near housing blocks. One shelter was permanently blocked off in 2013 when the construction of a new house removed the entrance steps and dislodged roof supports (Figure 57). In 2017, the steps down to another two shelters were observed as being overgrown with vegetation and used as dumps for broken furniture, rubble, and rubbish. These structures are not maintained, and it is unclear who is responsible for them, but they were once a regular feature within the lives of Ksamil residents.
HO has lived in Ksamil since 1973 and explained how these air raid shelters were designed for use by old or sick people, women, and children; because if Albania was under attack, everybody else formed the first defensive response. He recalled the Ksamil danger siren being tested each Thursday and practice drills whereby people were mobilised to the shelter or their assigned position on the peninsula. The premise was that if Albania were attacked, the People’s Army would be ready to fight within two hours of the alarm being sounded (HO, 14.04.17).

Weekly alarm testing was confirmed by Meritan Çeliku (MÇ), who has lived in Ksamil since 1981 when he was nine years old. He recalled that occasionally the siren would sound at night and his mother, known locally for being a good shot, would collect weapons and head out towards the hills. This demonstrates that not all Ksamil’s women went down to the air raid shelter; those with training and ability were expected to fight. MÇ explained that these preparations were to counteract foreign anti-Albanian operations that the leadership convinced people would arrive through parachute or seaborne landings (MÇ, 11.04.17).
Along with nationalistic indoctrination, Ksamil’s proximity to Corfu and by extension the rest of Greece and the West, meant that the imperialist threat on the peninsula was perceived as very real. The repeated training was a militarised response imposed on civilians, reservists and regular soldiers who were instructed to protect their designated location, MSB or trench position. These exercises worked in conjunction with the MSB installation programme, which was promoted psychologically and physically as a solid defence against clandestine assault. Despite repeated practice drills, no sabotage or offensive operations were attempted on the Ksamil Peninsula under communism.

The supposed secret nature of MSBs was reinforced to local children in Ksamil through propaganda and MČ remembered being taught political information on Tuesdays at school. This lesson was a two-way process; the paramount importance of national defence was taught, and pupils were instructed to inform the authorities if tourists (or locals) had asked questions about MSBs (MČ, 12.04.17). In this way children were conditioned into MSB paranoia at an early age by comprehending the importance of secrecy for state survival as well as developing a distrust of foreigners.

Contrary to this was the national perspective which viewed tourism as an instrument to generate necessary revenue because of the decline in financial assistance from China. Twelve new tourist-only hotels were constructed across Albania between 1973 and 1982, including one in Sarandë (Hall 1990: 39). This facilitated the principal period of Western tourism in Albania which spanned the late 1970s to early 1990s (Nallbani and Gilkes 2001: 23), the earlier part of which coincided with the main MSB installation phase on the Ksamil Peninsula. Foreign visitors to Albania were relatively few with an average of 2500 annually from 1976–80 (Hall 1984: 549), which increased steadily to 14,000 by 1989 (Nallbani and Gilkes 2001: 23).

The fear of alien influences on Albanian populations and ideology meant tourism planners had to consider the best ways to maximise economic gains and minimise potentially adverse impacts (Hall 1990: 44). From the early 1980s, organised tours to Butrint would stop off in Ksamil to eat in the only restaurant catering for tourists (Hall 1984: 550), meaning visitors could not roam too far. This was positioned above Ksamil Bay and tourists could swim from a small beach below, which could have created chance encounters between foreigners and coastal MSB installations. A local businessman (IN-5) explained how these interactions were
If you even just said ‘hello’ to a tourist, they could be German or Italian, you would be in trouble. Tourists were not allowed to take photographs of the bunkers, but if they did their camera would be confiscated to prevent them taking any more. Nobody was allowed to take pictures of any fortifications here. (IN-5, 26.06.08).

Despite being an inevitable occurrence, MSB discussions was considered a taboo subject for Ksamil residents. This was particularly frowned upon where numbers were involved as this was regarded as an attempt to gather statistics for foreign agencies (IN-5, 26.06.08). Within an increasingly paranoid socio-political context where the Sigurimi were encouraged to recruit local spies, MSB conversations were unlikely to take place outside the home. The population was aware that criticism of Albania’s bunkerisation plans was a key factor towards the 1974 purge of the Beqir Balluku group. This public knowledge suited the leadership’s defensive plans for Albania as any questioning of the programme would rarely be voiced within a society already devoid of political pluralism.

Post-communist MSB Perception and Engagement on the Ksamil Peninsula

MSBs in the Ksamil area were unaffected by the immediate post-1991 destruction of state property which devastated terraces, trees, and municipal buildings. Sabina Veseli (SV) from Tiranë was 21 when she first visited Ksamil in 1996 for a family holiday and was told about the special permits that had once been required to go there as part of communist national security. In Tiranë, SV had grown up around bunkers and as a child had been told: ‘We have these bunkers so no-one can do anything to us’. This conditioned her to have a strong belief in the power of the bunkers along Albania’s borders and assumed any invasion would never reach as far as the capital city.

Despite a familiarity with bunkers, SV recalled that in 1996 she was unprepared for what she saw in the Ksamil landscape as all the abandoned MSBs seemed unreal. She explained that this response was not fear, but rather questions, summarised as: what were MSBs
supposed to protect? Would they have stopped an invasion? How much money had they cost? Would foreign forces have even been concerned about these bunkers? She regarded the MSBs as state propaganda messages that told the people: ‘we are watching Greece, but we are also watching you, the people of Ksamil’ (SV, 20.04.17). Through the twin state pillars of paranoia and xenophobia, MSBs on the Ksamil Peninsula acted as multiple agents with eyes of discouragement directed at any Albanians contemplating escape.

SV explained that within her visit to Ksamil she also felt a sense of freedom as people could now travel in Albania without permission. She recalled that for her, the worst aspect of life under communism had been the constant oppression:

Don’t do this, don’t do that, and don’t say that. You aren’t allowed to say anything, don’t see Italian television, if you watch foreign television then you will go to jail, don’t read that book, don’t write to your relatives abroad, don’t contact them at all, your family is bad, your uncle has been in jail so you can’t go to university (SV, 20.04.17).

These doctrines were delivered to SV at home through broadcasts on State TV or radio and at school by teachers who also reinforced the idea that all of Albania’s MSBs contained soldiers ready to fight. SV remembered that people’s belief in bunkers for protection was strong but that her uncle had been sceptical. He would speak against the effectiveness of bunkers but only within the home, never outside or in the bar due to the risk of being overheard.

Despite the liberty offered by Ksamil in 1996, SV had found it difficult to get away from information that had been put into the head of her younger self, even though her mind told her that these were irrational concepts. On reflection, SV considered that the abandoned MSBs she saw on the peninsula had seemed like a poor hoax. There was no one in them and the government had wasted a lot of money, concrete, iron, and labour as they would not have stopped any invasion. In communicating these thoughts during our interview, SV verified Tilley’s actuality of experience when she pointed out the difficulty of expressing the impact of that time to me, a foreigner:

You don’t know, you have come a lot to Albania and can hear stories, but once you have lived it, it’s hard to explain. Even younger people now in Albania, they hear stories, but they don’t feel it. Once you’ve lived it, it’s different’ (SV, 20.04.17).
SV returned to visit Ksamil in 2001 but recalled that any awkward feelings she once harboured towards communist military infrastructure had diminished. On encountering MSBs along beaches and hills she no longer felt any emotion or formed any conscious impressions as her mind had moved on from the past (SV, 20.04.17). This shift in perception towards MSBs in the landscape over five years is an example of the forward direction of Albamodernity, which ties into Uzzell and Ballantyne’s view that: ‘space is endowed with “atmosphere” according to activities and memories of what has occurred there... as time separates us from past events our emotional engagement is reduced’ (1998: 158).

The diminished psychological power of MSBs is demonstrated across the Ksamil Peninsula by new post-communist re-use experiences which displaced the old. Neglected MSBs became near-invisible with overgrown vegetation while others were re-engaged for convenience and integrated into daily life. Within the town, MSBs and surrounding spaces were appropriated and used as sheds, for keeping pigs and chickens, to dump and burn rubbish, as cold storage or to cook meat, and as stands on which to paint upended boats (Figure 58).

Figure 58: Single Type 1 MSB installation used as stand to paint fishing boats, Ksamil town, 2008 (© author)
MSB re-use by fisherfolk along the Vivari Channel to store equipment, as overnight shelter and for cooking mussels demonstrates a continuity of cultural practice. It also connects abandoned MSBs to the ruins of Ali Pasha’s Castle or Butrint as all are used in this way and demonstrate the adaptability of people to opportune spaces. In this locale it is a particularly long-term tradition as fishery works in obsolete or ruinous spaces extends back to Late Antique Butrint, where excavations revealed sixth to tenth century evidence of mussel cooking within the vestiges of ancient buildings (Bowden 2020: 253).

These functional re-engagements of MSBs were passive rather than an attempt to affectively connect with relics of a previous regime, be they communist, Ottoman or Greco-Roman. Quotidian MSB re-uses also created some of the first narratives of individuality within the cultural biographies of such omnipresent and repetitive objects.

Figure 59: MSB souvenirs for sale in tourist shop, Sarandë town, 2008 (© author)
The economic focus of modern Ksamil is predominantly directed towards tourism, but curiously none of the local shops sell any form of MSB souvenir; a very different scenario to that observed in the town of Gjirokastër (see Chapter 5). The latest observations from Ksamil’s tourist shops were during the 2017 fieldwork when the only communist-related object for sale was an Enver Hoxha mug. In Sarandë this is not the case, however, as attested by ceramic, marble or plastic MSB ashtray and penholders that can be purchased in tourist shops along the seafront (Figure 59). Sarandë is a larger port-town with a greater volume of tourist traffic, particularly day-trippers from Corfu who are taken directly to Butrint without stopping in Ksamil, therefore there is less demand for souvenirs targeted towards foreigners.

**MSBs as Recreational Space in Ksamil: 1982–2013**

In 1982, when MÇ was ten years old, he witnessed Type 1 MSB elements being stockpiled by soldiers close to his house in Ksamil. This stack was left in place for four months, but rather than considering this a dangerous place, MÇ and his friends viewed it as their new and exciting playground for games of hide and seek and an adventure maze to crawl through (MÇ, 12.04.17). In this way the level of ownership through play felt by Albania’s children towards MSBs transcended the regime change.

After communism fell, a study of major fears within 1991–92 Tiranë children aged 10–13 found that they most feared criminals and hooligans and least feared war. This was interpreted as concerns for increased crime owing to rapid post-regime societal changes, and as a reflection of political naïveté in children isolated from the rest of the world, creating a lack of global comprehension (Tarifa and Kloep 1996: 70–73). This combined with the tradition of a close and insulated home-life meant that the anarchy of late 1990s Albania was a period of turmoil, but also opportunity for those young enough to be unconstrained by a dictatorial past.

It is conceivable that children’s experiences of conflict and trauma can paradoxically comprise a heightened sense of powerlessness fused with a measure of freedom that operates amongst any surrounding social and material chaos (Moshenska 2008b: 113). In Ksamil, such societal looseness and youthful liberty was present from 1997. This followed the collapse of several pyramid schemes which initiated Albania’s near civil war and crossed over into the
Mirgen Shametaj was aged nine when the trouble started and remembered playing with his 13-year-old friends who had found some hand grenades. They pulled the pins and threw them inside one of Ksamil’s coastal Type 1 Garnizon-3 MSB positions to see what damage they could cause. One did not explode and an older man passing by helped to make it safe by lighting a fire inside the MSB to set it off. MS recalled that not much damage was done to these bunkers by the grenades, and he had been disappointed that only a bit of surface concrete cracked off.

Weapons and bullets were freely available around 1997, and as a form of entertainment, MS and his friends would take bullets apart to create their own ammunition bombs to see how they exploded. Reflecting on these games now, he acknowledges: ‘I don’t know how we survived, but I was young, and it was a fun time’ (MS, 11.04.17). The delight of children breaking restrictions imposed by war on spaces and safety regulations detailed by Moshenska in Second World War Britain (2019: 78) was also evident in the anarchical chaos of a transitional Ksamil. The euphoria of delinquency within post-conflict is precisely the kind of feature that can be drawn out by using an anthropological modern conflict archaeological approach which enables investigations to go beyond simply digging up battlefields.

Morgan has noted that where historic events are replayed by children within MSBs, it is a form of ‘memory work’ based on the experiences that may still haunt older generations (2015: 35). With only second-hand stories of parents and grandparents to link with communist life, Ksamil’s children were at liberty to explore and engage with MSBs as liminal obsolescent remnants of a not-quite lost world. Games of hide and seek were common as such subterranean structures provided a perfect sanctuary from which to look out for the seeker. An obvious hiding-place perhaps, but exactly which bunker did the hiders go into?

AD was eight when communism collapsed and remembered playing with his friends on MSB installations, throwing stones as bombs, jumping around, and racing along trenches to the next bunker (AD, 14.04.17). Another 1990s children’s game incorporating Ksamil’s MSBs was called ‘stay on the top’ where two teams would fight and whoever kept the higher ground on the bunker cap was the winner (MS, 11.04.17). These were youthful reproductions of the manner that MSBs and trench routes had been utilised in communist training and were likely a consequence of stories once told by parents, transformed into play by children.
As these children grew up, their teenage selves often re-used former MSB playgrounds as underground hiding places where they could smoke cigarettes in secret (MS, 11.04.17). The endeavours of Ksamil’s children capture how a juvenile repurposing of militarised remnants can create new layers of meaning within post-conflict landscapes. These comprise the physical playgrounds of reality as well as those of the abstract imagination, conveying the globalised phenomenon of ‘playing in ruins’. These experiences are manifest within the aftermath of other twentieth century conflicts, such as post-First World War France and Belgium (Saunders 2003a: 146) and the Second World War in Britain where even urban bombsites became playgrounds (Moshenska 2019: 111), reflecting a universal transformation of landscape.

Most Albanian families continued to live as multiple-generation households in communist housing blocks that left little space for solitude. For anyone looking for privacy or to hang out with friends away from prying eyes, MSBs were an ideal getaway place. Field surveys along the Ksamil coastline between 2008 and 2012 demonstrated that many of the more accessible Type 1 MSBs had evidence of den-making with rough seats of concrete bricks with empty drink or snack containers and cigarette butts littering the floor (Figure 60). It was also common to find names, sketches and slogans graffitied on internal walls, typically of international football teams, star players, and logos of global sports brands. This testifies to the boredom, preferences, and globalised, or Albamodern, outlook of young Albanians.

Internal activities within Ksamil MSBs were once testament to their clandestine nature as a quiet, hidden space from which the outside world could be observed and lifestyle aspirations expressed. This interior post-communist MSB landscape functions in a similar closeted manner to that which occurred under communism. However, this layer was hybridised into a creation by and for children and teenagers who, in the context of a traditional patriarchal Albanian society, appeared mostly to be male.

Across post-1991 Albania, MSBs were common places for people to meet for trysts and were referred to as ‘love shelters’ in some fieldwork interviews. As it was under communism (PA, 13.04.17), the most frequent non-military use of MSBs has been as toilets. In Ksamil, this was noted as having taken place in the same conveniently accessible MSBs that had been turned into teenage dens, thus demonstrating how people of any age sought a concealed privacy within post-communist Albanian society.
Albanian bunkers in popular media typically refer to painted MSBs as much as they repeat the claim of 750,000 having been built. This superficial modification of the MSB exterior rests on a psychological approach utilised from 2000 in Tiranë by the then Mayor, Edi Rama, as part of his ‘A Return to Identity’ project. He applied a colourful dose of creativity towards communist housing blocks to alter both the Stalinist buildings and the relationship of inhabitants to their
urban environment (Pojani 2015: 79). By removing the concrete grey from the city and stimulating it with bright and bold designs, Rama aimed to redefine the visual urbanity and reassure Albanians that the country could move forward with confidence. Painting the city became painting Albania as this multi-coloured initiative was adopted elsewhere, specifically in tourist areas, and it was the paradox created by decorated MSBs that seemed to capture the most attention (Figure 61).

Figure 61: Type 1 MSB painted as a mushroom near the coast, Vlorë town, 2008 (© author)

Some MSBs were painted under communism with black, red, white, or green zigzags and squiggles as camouflage, which could occasionally be seen below modern painted patterns (Figure 62). In Ksamil these painted MSB palimpsests are also evident for post-communist decorations. Possibly the earliest to be decorated in this was seen in 1996, a Type 3 MSB was painted blue and yellow at a coastal Ksamil restaurant (Oliver Gilkes, 2014, pers. comm. 10 July). This demonstrates that prior to Rama’s identity project, some Albanians independently removed the MSB grey to enhance their business environments. This Type 3 MSB was painted over by tourists in 2005, but the earlier decoration remained visible at the rear (Figure 63).
Figure 62: Garnizon-3 installation with communist and post-communist painting, Qeparo Beach, 2008 (© author)

Figure 63: Blue and yellow Type 3 MSB, overpainted in 2005 by Kudrna tourists, Ksamil Peninsula coastline, 2005 (© author)
Figure 64: Garnizon-3 Type 1 MSB painted in 2006 by Kudrna tourists, Ksamil Peninsula coastline, 2009 (© author)

Figure 65: Garnizon-3 Type 1 MSBs painted in 2004 by Kudrna tourists, Ksamil Peninsula, 2006 (© S. Greenslade)
Although they no longer exist, Ksamil once contained Albania’s most vibrantly painted MSBs, created by foreign visitors. From 2004, the Czech Republic cycle holiday company ‘Kudrna’ included Ksamil MSB painting in their ‘Land of Mountains, Bunkers and Mercedes’ tour package (Růžička 2014: 50–54). Considering that the MSB concept was partially created as a defensive response to the Warsaw-Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, this bonded relic engagement was a strangely appropriate form of holiday entertainment.

Along the Ksamil coast, Kudrna-painted Type 1 and 3 MSBs vividly depicted animals, sea life, plants, including mushrooms, Butrint, national flags, bicycles, and cartoons (Figure 64). Some of the artwork had a 1960s psychedelic counterculture tone with flowers, peace CND symbols, anthropomorphised insects, or worms and even a yellow submarine. This Western Cold War style was blended with aspects of Albania’s military past with soldiers, weapons and the ‘fire centre’ Albanian MSB name represented by rising flames above the embrasure (Figure 65). MSB decoration dates of 2004–2010 were documented in fieldwork and the Kudrna company name appears with a copyright symbol, possibly as a droll statement on abandoned state property. On occasion, Ksamil’s MSBs were painted by other tourists, perhaps inspired by the Kudrna work, although they were minimalistic in comparison (Figure 66).
Further reconnaissance fieldwork around Albania observed MSBs re-used as solid stands for name signs, billboards, or light fittings to illuminate bars, restaurants, and tourist attractions. This temporal contrast of these Cold War objects, now physical supports for capitalist entrepreneurial spirit personifies the MSB as a Child of Two Worlds (Figure 67). This modern economy was also present on the Ksamil Peninsula where MSBs have become labels for landownership claims. The words ‘Pronë Private’ (private property) and measurements were observed, with names, initials, or phone numbers to communicate possession of lucrative beachfront plots (Figure 68).

North of Ksamil, the social transference of aspiration was further demonstrated along coastal beaches like Borsh, where MSB caps hosted painted global brand logos such as Coca-Cola, Adidas, Nike, and international football teams. This painted Westernised gaze transformed the MSB from being a locally relevant canvas to a global one in a far more overt manner than did the children and adolescents who scrawled inside Ksamil’s installations.

Figure 67: Type 1 MSB repurposed as light stand for Lëkurësi Castle restaurant, Sarandë town with Ksamil Peninsula in background, 2009 (© author)
Albania had no official ‘debunkerisation’ programme, and initially the wilful destruction of bunkers was forbidden by the Ministry of Defence (Williams 1994: 1). After the 1997 troubles, breaking bunkers was undertaken in a piecemeal and clandestine manner on the peninsula for money, and to clear land for business and housebuilding (MÇ, 12.04.17). What was once thought to safeguard the country was now perceived as holding it back economically during a time of financial hardship and uncertainty. With easy access to explosives for a few years after 1997, MSBs were blown up to extract and sell their iron content. Use of dynamite was apparently illegal, therefore only locations away from Ksamil town were destroyed in this way.

The remains of Type 1 and 3 MSBs treated in this way were observed in 2008, their caps
were gone but lower body parts and some metal embrasures and internal fittings remained extant (Figure 69). The numbers of MSBs broken in this way were low when compared to the 2011–2013 bunker breaking (see Chapter 5) and was not considered illegal by the then ruling Democratic Party. The only arrests occurred, not for destroying government property, but for the illegal use of dynamite (Anon 2010).

Figure 69: Single Type 1 MSB position with cap blown, Ksamil Peninsula coastline, 2008 (© author)

The popularity of Ksamil for holidays grew from the mid-late 2000s and the inevitable increase in building hotels, businesses, new beaches, and infrastructure led to piecemeal MSB destruction. On an individual level, a local business owner explained how he removed two Type 1 MSBs blocking a new access road for his beach restaurant. First, he packed the MSB interiors with old car tyres and set them alight, knowing that the rubber would burn for a long time. After cooling down, a pneumatic drill was used to break-up the concrete, which shattered ‘like it was made of glass’. To him, the concrete debris was more valuable as road hardcore,
whereas the pile of metal eventually disappeared, and he presumed it was taken by Roma (IN-13, 24.06.2008).

From 2011 to 2013, Type 1 MSBs were broken along the Ksamil Peninsula, leaving occasional fragments of colour within the grey concrete rubble to signify former painting activities (Figure 70). The last Garnizon-3 coastal position was destroyed in 2013, after initial breaking efforts in 2008 had proved unsuccessful (Figure 71). Type 2 MSB lines on hillsides were also targeted in places with no machine access, meaning a labour-intensive process requiring drills, hammers, and pickaxes with metal carried by hand to the nearest road. As noted by the 2017 fieldwork, this effort was not a deterrent and most Type 2 positions encountered had been destroyed (Figure 72). At present, the only remaining MSBs on the Ksamil Peninsula seem to be those within the Butrint National Park boundary, military base locations or difficult to access places.
Figure 71: Garnizon-3 installation, partially broken in 2008, finally removed in 2013, Ksamil town, 2008 (© author)

Figure 72: Destroyed Type 2 MSB cap with stone body walls left in position, Ksamil Peninsula, 2017 (© author)
As will also be seen in the Drino Valley case study, the Ksamil destruction works did not include rear tunnel segments of MSB emplacements (Figure 73). These were salvaged for re-use because their practical shape outweighed the profitability of their steel content. These hollow boxes of concrete have been reemployed along the Ksamil coastline to construct beach jetties (Figure 74), line out breakwaters and create sunbathing platforms (Figure 75), often weighted down using MSB rubble. The vast majority of MSB concrete debris remains where it was broken-up across the peninsula, waiting to be swallowed by the landscape. Despite the visual contamination of piles of grey-white jagged concrete detritus and associated environmental implications, MSB breaking has enabled some Albanians to redress the physical and financial toll extracted under communism, now repatriated as capitalist profit, which will be further discussed in chapter 5.

Figure 73: Prefabricated rear MSB box-tunnel segments intended for re-use rather than destruction, Ksamil Peninsula coastline, 2012 (© author)
Figure 74: MSB box-tunnels infilled with MSB concrete rubble for beach jetty, Ksamil coastline, 2012 (© author)

Figure 75: MSB tunnels as beach platform prior to completion of raised terrace, Ksamil coastline, 2012 (© author)
Concluding Comments

The Ksamil Peninsula is a microcosm of a communist Albanian coastal border landscape. It encapsulates multiple socio-political defence schemes put into operation across the temporal framework of Albania’s 1945–1991 historical trajectory. As illustrated in this chapter, there is the potential to track Albania’s shifting alliances through distinct militarised landscape impacts which reflect the degree of financial, material, and technical assistance provided by partners. Although this could also be directed towards developments in agriculture, roads, factories, and urban constructions, it is the military features which appear to consolidate a physical intent with an emotional experience that stems from the local to the global and encapsulate an overt xenophobia.

Military remains from earlier Albanian alliances are less discernible than those created while associated with China or during isolation. Only traces of Yugoslavian or USSR defences remain in the Ksamil Peninsula landscape, or they have been eradicated completely leaving the CIA’s written descriptions as the main accessible reference. The MSB landscape created with China and into isolation forms Albania’s most recent layer of defensive works. This demonstrates the complexity of closed border landscapes as military features are worked and reworked in response to local, national, and international defensive requirements. As highlighted on the Ksamil Peninsula, these temporal divisions have become less marked as full or partial destruction of MSBs removes their positions with fragmentary traces remaining where they once stood.

The depth of people to military engagement under communism is symbolised and encapsulated within MSBs above any other type of defence construction, possibly due to their high frequency across the landscape. This landscape was experienced by military personnel and civilians through People’s Army training, reservist obligations and children’s schooling. From the late 1960s, but particularly after 1973, MSB installation, use, and maintenance became constant physical and psychological endeavours that only diminished slightly after Hoxha’s death. The range of post-1991 MSB re-uses in Ksamil are indicative of a practical inter-generational local relevance which complemented their ultimate transformation into an object of foreign fascination.

The pre-MSB Yugoslavian and USSR landscapes which were explored on the Ksamil
Peninsula are not reflected by similar research in the Drino Valley. The following chapter will illustrate how landscape topology was utilised to create a fortified land border region with dense MSB installations in depth. There is a focus on object production and installation with experiences and perceptions during and beyond communism by different stakeholders and heritage practitioners. In addition, the impact of MSB destructions from 2011–2013 will be explored from local and tourism perspectives.
Chapter 5

Case Study 2: Drino Valley, Gjirokastër

Introduction

The Drino Valley is a wide flat and fertile plain though which the River Drin runs to the north west from the Greek border. This case study area is within the County of Gjirokastër, covering the municipalities of Gjirokastër, Libohovë and Dropull. It leads from the border crossing point with Greece at Kakavijë, through the valley to where the high Çajupi Plain is positioned. The plain is bordered by foothills, gorges and mountainous spurs which lead up to the steep mountain ranges of the Gjerë to the south west and the Shëndelli-Lunxhëri-Bureto chain along the north east. The SH4 road (mentioned in Chapter 2) cuts through the Drino Valley from Kakavijë to Vlorë then onto the coastal port-city of Durrës and is the main southern land route from the Adriatic coast to Greece. The area studied measures 48km in length with a maximum width of 23km across the north, tapering to 10km towards the Greek border to encompass an area of 1083.24km² (Figure 76).

The aim of this case study was to examine MSBs at a land border location as, similarly to the Ksamil Peninsula, the Drino Valley had been identified by the CIA as a potential invasion route from Greece (see Figure 3). Research visits averaging one week per year were made to this area in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012 and 2017. Over this research timeframe landscape differences and treatment of MSBs were noted, particularly the changes after 2011 when MSB destructions were initiated on a larger scale than had occurred previously. The earlier visits mostly used vehicle transport for rapid visual survey with short stops to comprehend the valley topography and the communist military elements situated within it. From this, key locations were identified for further investigation through field survey, photographic recording, and interviews.
Figure 76: Map of Drino Valley study area with place names mentioned in text (© author)
Between 2009–2017, five field visits were made to the Gjirokastër concrete factory, which is openly accessible, to explore its footprint through walkover surveys and make a photographic record of buildings, production remnants, and equipment. The decision to include the high altitude Çajupi Plain, where Type 5 MSBs were still extant, was made in 2017 and is a contributing factor as to why this study area is greater in size than the Ksamil Peninsula. This chapter will examine the manufacture and installation of MSBs within the Drino Valley landscape and investigate post-communist engagements from their use within tourism towards their eventual destruction and landscape aftermath.

Geographical and Historical Background

Settled in prehistoric times, the Drino Valley was once part of Epirus during the Classical, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Slavic, Venetian, and Ottoman periods when it functioned as an East to West trade route running from Vlorë on the Ionian Sea to Ioannina in modern Greece. There is a long thread of contested ownership on this Drino Valley landscape between Albania and Greece. Conflicting territorial and nationalistic claims have been made from both sides, particularly from the late nineteenth century break down of the Ottoman Empire. The following first half of the twentieth century saw challenges over the Drino Valley continue as it was occupied by forces from France, Greece, Italy, and Germany during the Balkan (1912–1913), and First World Wars (1914–1918). Albania had been declared an independent state in 1912; confirmed the following year at the London Peace Conference by the six Great Powers of Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia.

The Drino Valley is within an area that Dalakoglou calls, ‘the nationally charged territory of “South Albania” (according to Albanians) or “Northern Epirus” (according to Greeks)’ (Dalakoglou 2010: 136). A formal state of war had existed between the countries since the Second World War, which was lifted in 1987 after mutual recognition of the current border was agreed. The communist government had considered the Greek border a serious threat to its ideological position, particularly after Greece joined NATO in 1952, creating Albania’s only land window onto the West.

This historically sustained issue had implications for Albanian-Greek relations
throughout the twentieth century and remains present within politics and daily life discussions around Gjirokastër today (e.g. Ibid.: 137). This thesis will not discuss the rights of minority groups under communism, the post-1991 migrations, and any ethnic or territorial claims on the Drino Valley (see: Vickers and Pettifer 1997, Winnifrith 2002, Green 2005 and Dalakoglou 2017). However, it is worth noting that the high density of post-1973 MSB installation along the Drino Valley was more than an ideological mechanism of defence. Planting these unique Albanian ‘concrete mushroom’ products in such numbers was a nationalist statement of ownership, projected beyond the border into Greece as well as locally towards members of the Greek minority. This Cold War territorial marking is supported by similar findings by McWilliams along the Iron Curtain, where a late 1970s Italian bunker had been constructed on land gained from Yugoslavia after the borderline had been reconfigured (2013: 89).

The city of Gjirokastër, also known as the ‘City of Stone’, is the main settlement along the Drino Valley. It is positioned centrally on a mountainous spur at a height of around 300m and was once used as a control point for the Drino Valley. The Ottoman Empire used the city as an administrative capital after they invaded, then settled, this part of Albania between the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century. A large fortress dominates the Gjirokastër townscape, and its current form is the result of significant expansion works by Ali Pasha of Tepelenë, who controlled the area from 1811, with a later prison constructed in 1932 during the reign of King Zog I.

Gjirokastër contains more than 500 Ottoman detached tower houses whose solid defensive architecture reflects the mindset of that period, which focused on the protection of individual family groups. According to Mezini and Pojani, the defence concerns of family groups guided Gjirokastër’s urban morphology, creating a building typology which ‘illustrate[s] the disquieting compatibility of vernacular design, sensitive to topography and human needs, and war preparedness’ (2015: 397–399). The combination of being on a high, defendable position with wide vistas over the surrounding landscape meant that historically Gjirokastër was a much desired and fought over location within the Drino Valley.

The end of the Ottoman Empire also meant the end for constructing any new defensive houses for family units. Thirty years later, the Albanian people’s focus was directed away from the individual towards a communist ideological collective and national defensive consciousness. This New-Albanian mentality was physically reinforced in the expansion of
Gjirokastër city, doubling its size with new communal housing blocks, educational institutions, municipal buildings and industrial or manufacturing facilities. Just north of this expansion, at a place called Gerhot, the largest military base in the valley was established and remains in operation today. The appreciation of historic Gjirokastër was reflected by its designation as a Museum City by the Party in 1961 with its architecture ideologically described as late Medieval Albanian (Riza 1978: 1). Any protections afforded by this status did not extend beyond the 1967 abolition of religion, as part of the Cultural and Ideological Revolution, when most of the Ottoman mosques and Orthodox churches were destroyed or damaged.

The strength of Ottoman rule across the Drino Valley trade route for five hundred years was one reason why this area was particularly influenced by the spirit of Albanian nationalism which emerged from the late nineteenth century. This was a strong influence on Enver Hoxha who was born in 1908 in Gjirokastër and studied there until 1928 when he moved to Korçë to complete his studies and discovered Marxism (Gilkes et al 2009: 12). After studying and working abroad in France and Belgium, Hoxha was back in Korçë in 1939 when Italy invaded Albania. He briefly returned to Gjirokastër then moved to Tiranë for work where he participated in the 1941 founding meeting of the Albanian Communist Party (ACP) and was chosen as the Korçë group leader due to his lack of involvement in internal disputes (Fevziu 2016: 41–46).

For the Party to become a serious fighting opposition against Fascist forces and compete with other nationalist and monarchist movements, it was necessary to rise above their own petty quarrels. Within Albania’s Second World War resistance, Hoxha was active in the Tiranë area with the ACP, while his Gjirokastër hometown became a southern centre of partisan resistance to occupying forces and was one of the first places liberated in 1944. Guerrilla fighters in the Drino Valley had the advantage of intimately knowing their landscape and used the commanding views from rugged foothills and mountains to undertake clandestine movement and operations.

Under communism, the Drino Valley landscape was remodelled by the State as part of Albania’s drive towards modernisation and defence, both of which utilised the landscape’s topography, waterways, and roadways. Agricultural cooperatives were installed along the fertile plain with new processing or manufacturing enterprises established to increase self-sufficiency and create employment. The Drino Valley was heavily militarised with resources and economic assistance from the Yugoslavians and USSR, who sent military experts to Albania. The
Chinese military contribution was more detached but involved a sizeable amount of finance, materials and industrial expertise which enabled Albania to produce their own armaments and chemical explosives.

Under communism, national projects used the population as physical labour and an ideological tool to maintain state power (Blumi 1999: 320). These works also patriotically bound people to their developed landscapes while creating the New-Albanians of the future (Dalakoglou 2012: 571). In building a road network across Albania, the leadership were seeking to construct ideals of connected modernity that had not previously existed for Albanians. In the Drino Valley area, the (im)mobility of such an undertaking was exposed by the lack of access ordinary people had to private vehicles as well as to the forbidden Greek border zone (Dalakoglou 2017: 38). Albania’s road network was developed as a connected control system over the landscape and the people, and which worked in a similar ideological, nationalist and futurist manner as the MSB scheme. Roads compressed transport distances and reached remote areas for the first time. As such they facilitated the ongoing and increasing landscape militarisation of Albania and enabled MSBs to be installed across the whole country.

In the wake of communist collapse, the Drino Valley area suffered severe economic problems, particularly within the outdated and inefficient industrial complexes surrounding Gjirokastër. Under communism, the government had assigned more people than necessary to work in State industries so that everybody would have a job and a role in life. After 1991, there was no longer a State to pay wages and the result was a catastrophic loss of thousands of jobs and financial hardship for the Drino Valley area during the 1990s (S. Petrela 2012, pers. comm. 13 September).

This situation had been exacerbated by an earlier illicit migration of thousands of Albanians to Greece from mid-1990 when the Drino Valley borderlands were ‘transformed into vast crossing fields’ (Dalakoglou 2012: 580). This was a localised reaction towards a 2nd July foreign embassy storm in Tiranë by Albanians attempting to flee. For the Albanian Party of Labour, this was the boldest display of antiregime sentiment since the 1940s and was a challenge that signalled the decline of the regime’s control over the people (Biberaj 1998: 50). The scale of this migratory flow in the Drino Valley stalled productivity within State manufacturing and processing enterprises as over 70% of Albanians who left the country before the 1991 collapse were workers within the most productive age groups (Dalakoglou 2012: 580,

Today, the Drino Valley has recovered somewhat economically through tourism, remittances sent home by migrants, international development investment and businesses taking advantage of the good connections that the updated SH4 road provides between Greece and the port of Durres. The fortified borderland that once reduced this area to being a dead end zone of Albania has been transformed into an international crossing point at Kakavijë which has returned the Drino Valley to its pre-communist role as an East to West economic trading route with the addition of tourists (Figure 77). The historic centre of Gjirokastër was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005 for its outstanding Ottoman architecture which stood as a testament to the diversity of urban societies in the Balkans (UNESCO 2008).

Figure 77: Displaced Type 1 MSB overlooking Albanian road border crossing, Kakavijë, Drino Valley, 2012 (© author)

Gjirokastër and the Drino Valley are marketed as a visitor destination which offers multiple layers of history: from Hellenistic or Roman archaeological sites to traditional medieval and Ottoman folk-culture to wartime and communism. At Gjirokastër, ethnographic and historical museums are complimented by festivals of intangible heritage which promote
traditional polyphonic singing, music, and costumes. Tourism initiatives have created artisan crafts by fusing traditional techniques with modern products to sell at the Bazaar, facilitate visits inside restored Ottoman tower houses and enabled the opening of a large underground Cold War tunnel complex.

The wider Drino Valley environment can be experienced through eco and agritourism, horse riding, hiking, camping and food-culture tours. The outlying locations for some of these activities is potentially the only opportunity that modern tourists could find an in-situ Drino Valley MSB. The former MSB landscape across the Drino Plain was uniquely densely-packed in the context of southern Albania, and the impact of this loss on tour-guiding content, tourist expectations, local initiatives and opinions are discussed below.

Research Overview

The historical freedom of movement around the Albanian-Greek border area ended when Hoxha caused post-Second World War Albania to ‘disappear’ with tight communist controls in his determination to prevent Greece from realising their ongoing territorial claims (Green 2005: 49). Like the Ksamil Peninsula, military restrictions were put in place with a buffer zone created along the land border, which required special permits to enter. However, unlike the Ksamil Peninsula where people could pass the land checkpoint at Manastir to access Butrint, the Vrinë Plain or the hills beyond, the only destination southeast of the Drino Valley was Greece, meaning a much stricter level of militarisation was required. Dalakoglou termed this route (now SH4) running towards the Greek border at Kakavijë, as a ‘road to nowhere’ (Dalakoglou 2010: 138).

The early communist militarisation of the Drino Valley comprised extensive fieldworks towards the Greek frontier zone. Created with Yugoslavian and USSR assistance, these were detailed by the CIA in their observations on defence constructions and armament installations. Machine gun and semi-subterranean positions in the Drino Valley were described as either guerrilla-types or concrete, covered by rows of tree trunks and earth (CIA 1951c: 1). Although this period is not covered further in this chapter, it must be noted that my field investigations concluded most of this earlier landscape militarisation layer is no longer visible.
No evidence was observed above ground on walkovers or as archaeological scars during my aerial digital mapping. As an example, the CIA reported the 1949 construction of three anti-tank ditch chains spanning the width of the Drino Valley plain, each measuring 4m wide and 6m deep (CIA 1949: 1). The line locations were detailed within the report, but I was unable to find any visual evidence of these substantial military fieldworks. As was the case on the Ksamil Peninsula, it is likely these were filled-in as the Drino Valley plain was remodelled and increasingly turned over for agriculture.

Field surveys around the Drino Valley highlighted the extent to which the area was fortified with MSBs from the late-1960s with a dramatic increase in installations from around 1973 (see below). Most MSBs have associated rear tunnels and communication trenches, but the full extent of militarisation works in the Drino Valley was not realised until these landscapes were examined from the air during my digital mapping. The flat Drino Valley plain is dominated by MSB installations, which become less dense as they extend up valley sides and onto mountain peaks (Figure 78).

Foothills and gorges along the valley sides were used extensively for small army bases, anti-aircraft gun positions, trenches, and tunnels. Forward-facing (to the Greek border) slopes of side gorges were used for offensive or observation military works, and rear (away from the Greek border) slopes were used as protection for storage tunnels, army bases, equipment depots and training areas. This demonstrates how the Drino Valley topography was a key consideration within communist strategies of militarisation, the importance of which is evident across this border landscape.

Examinations across the historical area of Gjirokastër city have yielded very few MSB positions, likely due to the steep topography upon which the town is built, particularly along the southern forward face, where it was usual to place fortifications. As one of the highest points, the Castle was used for gun positions with rock-cut tunnels and small air raid shelters built into rear cliffs created by road terracing (Figure 79). The new communist area of Gjirokastër also contains very few MSBs as it was constructed northwards, protected by the mountainous spur of the historic area. As with the Ksamil Peninsula case study, without being able to access either local or national archives, I have had to rely on information gathered during interviews and my general discussions with people for local landscape details, dates, quantities of MSBs produced and provenance of materials.
Figure 78: Map showing cross-section of Drino Valley with MSBs plotted by type © author
Figure 79: Air raid shelter tunnel in historic area of Gjirokastër city, Drino Valley, 2012 (© author)

To comprehend communist Drino Valley MSB experiences, three former workers from the Gjirokastër concrete factory were interviewed together. This was conducted in 2010 at the factory site on one of the MSB production platforms. Two interviewees worked at the factory from the early-1970s on MSB production as a concrete and metalwork technical specialist (IN-7) and a technical worker (IN-8). The third interviewee spent two years at the factory as a general worker in the early 1980s (IN-6).

The different factory areas were explained and the process of MSB production was discussed. In addition, individual and collective memories of their time working at the factory and communist life were used to draw out intangible aspects of the factory’s cosmology. In 2008, a former MSB installer was interviewed who spent his whole national service (1980–1982) as part of a mounting team (IN-2, 24.08.08). This provided insights into the physical nature of this work and mentality of those doing it. Additional information was gathered informally from a taxi driver who I hired for a day (IN-10, 11.04.17) and Andrea Kristo who was
building an eco-hostel and restaurant on the Çajupi Plain, next to Type 5 MSB positions.

The historical tourist area lies on the route to Gjirokastër castle, where a recently restored Bazaar contains shops where artisan products are made and sold alongside other tourist items. These shops were examined to see what MSB related tourist items were available with two traders interviewed about their MSB products. Stonemason Muhedin Makri (MM, 09.04.17) was a highly skilled craftsman who created a wide range of decorative stone items from his shop, including MSB shaped ashtrays (Figure 80).

Entrepreneur Lubiana Bajoa (LB, 10.04.17) has spent ten years working on Gjirokastër’s artisan crafts programme which channels local skills towards creating traditional and modern handicrafts. Recently, this included a range of bags made from surplus military trousers which featured the distinctive MSB shape on the front. Additional information for Drino Valley tourism through communist heritage, MSBs and the impact of the 2011–2013 bunker destructions was provided by interviews with local heritage professionals and tour guides: IN-9 (18.07.12), Kristina Fidhi (KF, 10.04.17), Edvin Lamce (EL, 08.04.17) and Ilir Parangoni (IP, 10.04.17). The results of these discussions also included ideas of local and tourist MSB perceptions and what these objects may do for the Drino Valley and wider Albania in the future.

Figure 80: Muhedin Makri in his shop with stone mushroom-shaped ashtray, Gjirokastër, Drino Valley, 2017 (© author)

5 Muhedin Makri passed away on 14 March 2020 at the age of 80
Type 4 MSBs were installed across the Drino Valley as single positions in a range of sizes. These are mostly located along the flat valley plain but were mapped up hillsides closer to the Albanian-Greek border, where they are concentrated most. As described previously (see Chapter 3), their main characteristic is that they were formed in-situ by pouring mixed concrete into wooden shuttering over a thin metal mesh. This left an identifiable distinctive imprint around their edges and is a simple construction technique likely used previously during communism. This raises the possibility that some of the mapped Type 4 MSB positions were built earlier than 1967, but as no dates were found inscribed into the explored installations, this remains unclear.

Figure 81: Type 4 MSB remaining after destruction of Type 1 and 3 MSBs as evidenced by tunnel stacks and broken concrete Drino Valley Plain near Kakavijë, 2012 (© author)
The Type 4 MSB method of construction was replaced from 1973 after the onset of modular prefabrication to create later MSB types. Type 4 MSBs within the landscape were utilised as reference points to produce extended stop-lines across the valley plain (see also Figure 19 for coastal example). In a strange twist, most Type 4 MSBs were spared the 2011–2013 scrap metal breaking as they were surrounded by more profitable prefabricated MSBs. This unofficial level of protection has reversed the temporality of the Drino Valley MSB landscape with earlier installations remaining in-tact, whereas more recent MSB types have been destroyed (Figures 81 and 82).

Type 5 MSB installations also started during the 1960s and worked in conjunction with Type 4 MSBs. The adaptability of Type 5 MSBs lies in their varied shapes and use of small, prefabricated elements with stonework. This was addressed earlier (see Chapter 3), but within the context of the Drino Valley they were positioned along valley sides on steep edge slopes.
where it would not have been an option to mix large amounts of concrete to cast forms in-situ (see Figure 22). The end date for Type 5 MSBs in this case study area is unclear but stop-lines incorporating Type 5 and 2 MSBs were plotted on the digital map. Both are similarly suited to high locations by their transportability, and it is probable that Type 2 MSBs ultimately replaced Type 5 MSBs sometime after the mid-1970s.

The Çajupi Plain is on a high plateau (1250m) at the northern end of this study area which has seen increasing tourist numbers since it became part of the Zagoria National Park in 2015 (Figure 83). This area is part of a former Ottoman trading route which ran over the mountains into Greece. The communist leadership identified it as a weak invasion point where parachutists or aircraft could potentially land. To counteract this, an army base was established on the plain with T-shaped Type 5 MSBs constructed later during the 1960s (Figure 84). The route to the heights of the Çajupi Plain under communism was more of a track than a solid road, described as being better for horses than vehicles (IN-10, 11.04.17).
During the Çajupi Plain fieldwork I met Andrea Kristo (AK), a 60-year-old man who was building an eco-hostel and restaurant. He told me that poor road access had been the reason why most prefabricated concrete elements for these Type 5 MSBs had been cast at the army base. Transporting raw materials had been far easier and more reliable than the finished pieces (11.04.17). This possibility is evidenced by the construction of these Type 5 MSBs being primarily of stonework, with relatively few simple prefabricated elements used for roof struts and the embrasure (Figure 85). AK explained that the positioning and formation of these MSB was decided by a specialist military engineer, with the physical work done by soldiers and civil department workers (AK, 11.04.17).

As of 2017 there were 23 Type 5 MSB on the Çajupi Plain, which is the largest group remaining in the Drino Valley study area. AK told me there used to be more, but people broke them up thinking they contained ‘the same amount of metal in as a house’. When it was realised that this was not the case, the breakers gave up (AK, 11.04.17). AK told me he would
like to restore two of the Type 5 MSBs next to the eco-hostel for the benefit of tourists. His plans included the excavation of one Type 5 MSB position, which has filled with hill wash and therefore has the potential to contain communist or earlier displaced archaeological remains (Figure 86). Andrea’s ideas will be discussed further below within the context of post-communist MSB engagements.

Figure 85: Interior of T-shaped Type 5 MSB showing stone walls and reinforced concrete elements, view from rear tunnel, Čajupi Plain, Drino Valley, 2017 (© author)
Prefabricated MSB Production at the Gjirokastër Concrete Factory: 1972–1986

MSBs installed across the Drino Valley were manufactured at a concrete factory on the outskirts of Gjirokastër city, between the Drino River and the SH4 road to the Greek border. Known as ‘The Construction Enterprise of Gjirokastër’ (Ndërmarrja e Ndërtimit, Gjirokastër), this complex was established in the 1950s as a brick production site which expanded in the 1960s. The expansion was to enable the modular production of different prefabricated reinforced concrete shapes for urban and rural developments in the Drino Valley. These were used to build housing, create new industrial and manufacturing centres, install utility poles for electricity and communication lines, improve agricultural cooperative capacities and increase military fortification levels. This latter aspect included the manufacture of precast blocks for
Type 5 MSB and the supply of raw materials for in-situ concrete mixing for Type 4 MSBs.

From 1971, the Gjirokastër factory was further remodelled to incorporate the planned 1973 increase in Albania’s bunkerisation plans (see Chapter 3). New exterior linear working platforms were constructed with wheeled overhead gantry cranes installed to manoeuvre the heavier elements of Type 1, 2 and 3 MSBs (Figure 87). At this time, the factory employed 1,000 people, of which 200 would be working on the MSB programme in shifts (IN-6, 10.07.10). The year following Hoxha’s death, instructions came from Tirana to stop MSB production at Gjirokastër and, according to IN-8, this was because the area had enough bunkers and did not need any more (IN-8, 10.07.10).

Figure 87: MSB working platform to rear at Gjirokastër concrete factory, Drino Valley, 2009 (© author)

All communist manufacturing at the Gjirokastër factory ceased after the regime fell in 1991. Private businesses eventually moved into parts of the factory, where somewhat ironically the capitalist manufacture of concrete blocks, slabs, posts, and pipes was supported by the use of communist-formed moulds. Much of the former layout has been retained, and the following
has been identified by fieldwork: gravel extraction areas with machinery, storage tanks for washing and grading, a concrete mixing plant, a metalworking building, a concrete testing laboratory, a workers hotel and restaurant and a former museum used to educate local schools about Gjirokastër’s construction achievements under socialism.

During the early-1970s expansion of the Gjirokastër factor, metal moulds were created to cast the first large prefabricated MSB elements. Former metalworker and interviewee IN-8 explained that from 1972 he spent two years forming iron moulds for different MSB designs. Initially this was for Type 2 MSBs, then was moved onto wielding larger moulds for Type 1 and Type 3 MSBs. Once this work was completed, he moved to a different section as a technical worker and manufactured MSB elements. IN-8 also told me that he did not do this work out of choice, it was the government who selected his job (IN-8, 10.07.10). IN-7 said that to work at the Gjirokastër factory, knowledge and skills were not as important as having a strong belief in the Party as the ideology required those with faith in the system to function (IN-7, 10.07.10).

Figure 88: Type 1 MSB cap mould with loophole slots, 1m scale, Gjirokastër concrete factory, Drino Valley, 2017 (© author)
The prefabrication process to create a Type 1 MSB cap was explained by IN-8 within our discussions. First, the inside of the mould was coated with oil to prevent the concrete setting against the metal. Next, two meshes formed from steel rebars were inserted into the mould. These had the cap loopholes incorporated into their design, which fitted into corresponding holes on the mould sides (Figure 88). To keep the cap halves as separate parts, a metal barrier was inserted across the middle of the mould before the concrete was poured in. Finally, a smaller hemisphere-shaped mould was placed on top to create the curved interior of the cap. After a few days, the semi-set cap halves were removed from the mould and an embrasure fitted into one half whilst the concrete was still malleable. The cap halves were then watered until fully hardened, a process which took 16–20 days (IN-8, 10.07.10).

I enquired as to how many MSBs were produced per month at the factory and was told that the output was dictated by weekly guidelines depending on targets laid out by the Party (IN-6, 10.07.10). IN-8 remembered that this was normally 30–40 full MSBs per month and that the construction platforms were always full (IN-8, 10.07.10). Once MSB parts were ready for use, they were removed by a civilian brigade who used Chinese trucks to take them to a central depot. This was the distribution point from where MSBs were taken by military groups for installation across the Drino Valley (IN-7, 10.07.10).

Fieldwork investigations at the Gjirokastër factory complex yielded more extensive physical remains pertaining to the MSB programme than was in evidence at Vrion (see Chapter 4). Completed prefabricated MSB elements remained around the factory, presumably never collected, with some large Type 1 MSB cap moulds present on the production platform. These are formed of 20mm thick steel which thickens towards the top, where it measures 2.95m in diameter and stands to a height of 1m. As seen at Vrion, an MSB mould at the Gjirokastër factory has been adapted for re-use as a water container. The loophole slots have been welded up so it could retain water (Figure 89).

Interestingly this was a common repurposing function for these moulds with some being removed from this factory during the 1990s because many houses at the time were not connected to running water (E. Çaushi, 2018 pers. comm. 13 October). Photographer Robert Hackman documented MSB moulds being re-used in the north of Albania as lime-mixing pits near Shkodër (Hackman 2019: 79) and can be considered as another functional form of MSB bricolage.
Under the communist system, Albania’s government had maintained an egalitarian wage structure. The number of workers at factories was fixed with each being assigned a specific job. Wages were set nationally and for 1983, the monthly pay of a worker was roughly 400AL (Albanian Lek) and about 900AL for a manager (Zickel and Iwaskiw 1994: 127). The Gjirokastër concrete factory can be used as an example of how this worked in practice as it was separated into departments for general workers, specialists, engineers, drivers, cleaners, mechanics, technicians, and maintenance.

Two former workers recalled that most of the work tasks were kept separate, meaning different groups or shifts would not mix (IN-6 & IN-7, 10.07.10). Regarding wages, IN-8 said that although his work on MSB production contributed towards national defence, it was classed as manual labour and low paid. He was in the 3rd category of pay scale meaning he received around 430AL per month based on a six-day working week (IN-8, 10.07.10).

The most memorable event IN-7 could recall during his time working at the factory
was in 1985, when hearing of Hoxha’s death. The entire workforce had been gathered together by the factory bosses and it was announced that: ‘today our great leader has left us’. IN-7 recalled that every single person was upset and crying, over one thousand people (IN-7, 10.07.10), which to IN-6 reflected a certain humanity people felt towards others back then (IN-6, 10.07.10). IN-8 agreed and remembered the sadness in everybody because of this news but reflected that this memory seems unreal today (IN-8, 10.07.10). Hoxha’s death had turned Albania into a State of mourning. The same people who had been completely indoctrinated with Hoxha’s frenzied ideology were devastated and feared that all was lost for the future (Hamilton 1992: 21).

The psychological conditioning of the population forged nationalism through the cult of Enver Hoxha and the Party and was remembered by IN-7. He recalled that from his earliest school class, they were taught that Hoxha expected them to ignore the Western world and refuse the temptations of capitalism (IN-7, 10.07.10). IN-6 added that at that time they only had one TV and radio station which put pressure on people through propaganda to keep them scared of the outside world. He asked me how they were to know anything else? (IN-6, 10.07.10). This reflects how national narratives and practice can be used to organise historical memories of a people, which in turn can result in these being embedded for a long time within culture, politics, and ways of thinking (Roediger and Wertsch 2009: 13). In asking the former workers what they had thought of producing so many MSBs to defend Albania, IN-7 explained that at that time they genuinely had no idea whether they would be attacked or not, but needed to be prepared (IN-7, 10.07.10).

During the on-site interview, I enquired how the former employees felt to be back at the factory. For IN-6 it was less important as he only spent a short amount of time working there, but both IN-7 and IN-8 agreed that the place meant something to them. They had spent their youth and half of their working lives in this place. IN-8 said that for a long time, his daily routine had revolved around being told what was needed, what he was to do and that this was the same for all the workers at the factory (IN-8, 10.07.10). Both agreed that they did not miss the lying and indoctrination of the system, but IN-7 said he was sad because the factory had once been a neat and tidy place, full of life with many plants and flowers. He thought that the destruction, rubbish, and weeds that have characterised the factory space since the fall of communism were the opposite of his memories (IN-7, 10.07.10).
The three former workers I interviewed together at Gjirokastër have remained friends since their time working at the factory. They told me they have good memories of their time at the Gjirokastër factory, but as more of a reflection on the people than the work they did. IN-6 said he felt that back then people were more connected and caring about each other, like brother and sister. For him, being part of a collective was a decisive factor in this as people would work, eat, drink, and have fun together. He considered that this part of the communist system made them closer to each other in a way that is different to now (IN-6, 10.07.10).

Interviewee IN-7 agreed with this, adding that people were friendlier with more faith in one another under communism, whereas now people seem more distrustful. He also considered that people were willing to help each other more back then and would do so without the falsehoods and sarcasm which characterise capitalist Albania (IN-7, 10.07.10). These discussions illustrate the importance of gathering intangible aspects of Albania’s industrial heritage in fieldwork while it is still possible. This issue was highlighted by Parangoni and Ayres, who considered it of equal importance to tangible industrial remains across Albania. The communities forged under communist industrialisation works link to the present through memories and meanings that have been maintained beyond the life of the factory (2015: 111).

Many of Albania’s former communist industrial facilities echo Edensor’s transient material status of objects within ruins (Edensor 2005: 319), where new meanings are continually being constructed as former factories are subject to robbing, clearances, remodelling, and modern re-use. Although much of the Gjirokastër factory is in disrepair, with only concrete and metal frames remaining for larger buildings, some areas have been maintained and adapted. The five research visits I made over eight years enabled these changes to be observed, documented, and explored.

The key difference between the first (2009) and most recent (2017) visits was a noticeable reduction in the amount of metal debris and machinery littering the site. It is assumed that the ‘Skrapomania’ (see Chapter 3) of Albania was largely responsible for this, particularly across 2011–2013. During a field visit in 2012, I met a husband and wife who were breaking out metal tracks from the concrete floors of the factory with picks. He was a former factory worker who assured me that the metal MSB cap moulds there were safe from theft because they belonged to somebody, whereas bunkers along the Drino Valley are accessible.
so anybody can remove them.

Later MSBs in the Drino Valley Landscape: 1973–1986

From 1973, Type 2 MSBs were installed in higher mountainous areas of the Drino Valley, along gorges facing the border with Greece and lower foothills edging the flat plain. Very few Type 2 MSBs were identified during field surveys in the Drino Valley, only along the lower valley edges, and discussions with local people did not yield the location of any large concentrations. After digitally mapping MSB locations, it appears that these are predominantly located within the southern half of the Drino Valley and in mountains near the Albanian-Greek border, where it ‘dog-legs’ to the north and east (see Figure 76).

The installation of Type 2 MSBs represents the first wave of Albania’s upscaled post-1973 bunkerisation plans (see Chapter 3), initiated while Type 1 MSBs moulds were being made and designs trialled by the military. This involved firing large calibre guns at test installations on the valley plain adjacent to the Gjirokastër concrete factory (IN-6, 10.07.10). There are no Type 2 MSBs on the flat plain of the Drino Valley, which seems to have been reserved exclusively for Type 1 and 3 MSBs (Figure 87), excepting those Type 4 MSBs already emplaced.

MSBs were to be used by the military and trained civilians to defend Albania in the event of an invasion crossing the border from Greece. The scale of MSB installations across the Drino Valley highlights how the idea of soldiers always being inside these bunkers, propagated in schools under communism (see Chapter 4), was not the reality. MSBs in key militarised locations, close to the border, army bases or supply depots would have been used for observation and patrol purposes. However, with a total of 7687 MSB positions plotted across the study area of the Drino Valley, it was unlikely that this number of soldiers, national service conscripts or reservists would have been spared from training or other national works to wait around in MSBs. It seems that the defence strategy intended to use the clusters of MSB stop-lines across the Drino Valley plain (see Figure 78) as retreating lines against invasion rather than all hosting personnel at the same time.
From the age of 18, IN-2 did his national service (1980–1982) with an MSB installation team in the mountainous areas of the Drino Valley and parts of the Sarandë region. He recalled that it would take about one week to build a Type 2 MSB position and four to five weeks for a Garnizon-3 MSB position, but this would depend on its location. A technical engineer directed the MSB installation works with a military officer overseeing the military service conscripts. Unlike MSB works on the Ksamil Peninsula, where installation tasks appeared to operate as separate layers, the remote nature of mountainous works meant that IN-2’s team often had to open their own MSB holes and trenches.

This was an extremely physical job, and many locations had poor access for the transportation trucks which took MSB parts as far as they could, after which animals and forceful toil was required. The manoeuvring of MSB elements was tricky work and IN-2 explained that soldiers who were not attentive got hurt with cuts and damaged their arms or legs. The worst memory he has of this time was hearing of an incident where three soldiers died
because the lorry crane broke while unloading Type 1 MSB caps and they were crushed, which unnerved his group (IN-2, 24.06.08).

IN-2 explained how much he hated doing MSB installation, not only because it was hard physical labour, but because he considered the selection process as unfair. Before his national service started, he had suspected that his time would be spent working with bunkers as his uncle had been put in prison by the regime and ultimately remained there for 27 years. This meant his family was marked as containing a ‘biographical mistake’ (see Chapter 1), an extended stain on IN-2’s character that he resented because it resulted in him becoming ‘one of the lowest class soldiers, even though we worked the hardest’ (IN-2, 24.06.17). For IN-2, this ‘mistake’ followed him beyond national service as he was subsequently deployed to work on artificial lakes in the Sarandë area which meant more years of digging.

For IN-2, his time spent mounting MSBs was the most physical job he has ever done, with the working day starting at 7am and finishing at 5 or 6pm. He explained how he was always tired, sometimes so exhausted that by evening he could not chew his food. His group worked every day for two years because installing MSBs was considered a high priority task, but this importance was not reflected in their wages. IN-2 said that they were only given 150AL per month with which he could have bought 15 ice-creams, but he used it to buy shaving materials to keep himself clean. To him, this was barely a payment against the time and effort they put into their work.

After a year of installing MSBs, IN-2 said that a communication from the leadership was sent out to the military calling for them to work faster. For a short time after this, his group slept in the MSBs they had just installed rather than going back down to base. Overall, what he endured during his national service on the MSB scheme, he now considers as both amazing and unreal. He explained:

“We didn’t know really what was going on outside, as soldiers we used to sing this song, that told how “we dance in front of the mouth of the wolf, that we are so brave in front of the danger”, but we didn’t know whether there was a wolf there and whether she was really hungry and wanted to eat us. We just did what we were told to do (IN-2, 24.06.08).

During communism, and particularly in border areas, this ‘dancing in the mouth of the wolf’ song was often sung as an act of defiance by Albanians towards outside imperialism (Vullnetari
IN-2’s reflections show that by the 1980s this rousing spirit, like many aspects of life in Albania, had waned and singing it was more of an unquestioned inheritance from the past.

The density of prefabricated Type 1 and 3 MSBs across the Drino Valley plain was one of the most visual, material, and symbolic expressions of communist Albania. This not only demonstrated their totalitarian stance against the outside world, but also represented the power and indoctrination of a nationalist agenda. In this way, the manufacture and installation processes which created this monumental MSB architecture contributed to organising New-Albanians. To Hoxha, this mindset was Albanianism, whose perfectly attuned subjects would unquestioningly work towards the bright future of the state.

**Post-communist MSB Engagements in the Drino Valley**

*MSB Destruction: 2011–2013 and aftermath*

After the communist regime fell in 1991, MSBs remained within Albania’s landscape and were technically owned by the State (Williams 1994). Before coming to power in 1992 the Democratic Party, led by Sali Berisha, pledged to dismantle bunkers at the earliest opportunity (Kalo 1993, as quoted in Hall 1994: 153). Despite the government’s desire to obliterate the relics of communism, this did not materialise as this expensive difficulty was not a priority in the context of 1990s upheavals. The density of bunkers of all types means that they covered what would have been valuable agricultural land, but Albania was unable to finance such a wholesale removal and disposal, and the population did not regard bunker removal as a personal responsibility.

Since 1992, MSBs in the Drino Valley have been removed piecemeal to create larger tracts of land for agriculture, for urban expansion and road widening (EÇ, 06.04.17). In addition, through processes of natural erosion, MSBs along seasonal watercourses or on steep valley edges were dislodged from their positions. This was a relatively slow process which did not have a great impact on MSB numbers. Most MSBs had been left to grow over and from a distance it was challenging to discern them clearly, particularly through the high grasses of the
early summer months (Figure 91). This changed from late 2010, when MSBs in the north of Albania were broken up using construction machinery to extract their metal content which was sold as scrap. By the following year, similar works had spread to other parts of Albania including the Drino Valley where the density of MSB installations had the potential to yield a good financial profit.

This object re-commodification worked in conjunction with the former ‘Steel of the Party’ metallurgical complex at Elbasan, which remains the only place in Albania where scrap metal can be processed. The steelwork plant at the complex is now under Turkish ownership with the Kurum company, which is ironic given the region’s previous Ottoman domination. It was here that MSB steel, amongst other metals, was gathered in the ‘Skrapomania’ of Albania (Figure 92), processed then reformed back into rebars. These were sold to the Albanian government for large national projects and highway infrastructure works and purchased by commercial construction enterprises (IN-9, 18.07.12).
The increased collection of metals for Elbasan was prompted by a rise in the global price of steel which started in 2010, peaked across 2011 to 2012, but hit a ten-year low in 2015. The complexities of the global steel trade are far beyond this discussion, but it is worth noting that an increased scrap metal collection in Albania was linked to a higher global demand from emerging markets, such as China, which caused prices to rise (Wårell 2018). These wider events were reflected in Albania as the Elbasan factory scrap metal purchase price doubled from 20AL to 40AL per kilogram (0.15 to 0.30 Euros) between 2010–2012, (IN-9, 18.07.12). This was exceptional and short lived as by 2015 the price had returned to 20AL, which remains the average price at Elbasan today (T. Resemeliu 2020, pers. comm. 28 June).

Discussions and interviews regarding the 2011–2013 MSB breaking on the Drino Valley plain have revealed that one of the main facilitating factors was a far greater availability of heavy machinery. In Albania, the global credit-crunch did not impact the economy until 2010,
after which much construction equipment was laid idle (IN-9, 18.07.12). MSB breaking was profitable (Figure 93), but breaking PZ bunkers was even more so, particularly when there is not much other work available. The metal contained in a single Type 1 MSB was worth between 260–600 Euros, whereas PZ bunkers contained a value of up to 5,000 Euros, depending on exact prices given at Elbasan (IN-9, 18.07.12; EÇ, 06.04.17).

Extracted steelwork was either taken to a local collection point or directly to Elbasan for a better price (IN-9, 18.07.12; KF, 10.04.17, LB, 10.04.17). Even considering any payments to landowners, farmers, workers or for transportation — a considerable amount of wealth would have been created for anybody involved. For many, this was likely viewed as a form of justice for the previous hardships that Albanians endured.

In fieldwork discussions and interviews it has not been possible to fully determine an exact reason to why, after so long in the landscape, MSB destruction for metal extraction was allowed by the authorities. Conflicting reports have created confusion, but the actual reason
does not appear to be a priority for Albanians. In a demonstration of Albamodernity, most do not care enough to find out why it started, and consider MSBs to be part of their past, not future.

I have been told that MSBs were declassed from the Ministry of Defence inventory which removed their legal protection (IN-9, 18.07.12), a reason strongly refuted by the Head of the MOD archives in our interview a few years later (TK, 06.04.17). Other interviewees told me that MSB removal was part of a European Union funded grant (LB, 10.07.17), a work creation scheme for businesses because of the need for steel (KF, 10.04.17) or that their destruction had been part of a new governmental law (IP, 10.04.17).

As stated earlier (see Chapter 1), MSBs have no cultural heritage protection as they are not considered worth of designation as national assets. From 2005–2013 (re-elected in 2009) Sali Berisha of the Democratic Party, who earlier had pledged to remove bunkers, did not consider any communist legacies as heritage. In the context of a high global metal price, it would have been far cheaper for the Albanian government to bulk purchase recycled rebars from Elbasan than import them. I consider this the decisive factor as to why MSB breaking was not prevented, because extracting the metalwork for recycling was a form of national interest that would ultimately save the government money.

This changed in 2013 as the Socialist Party, led by Edi Rama, came to power. When governments change in Albania, so does the civil service which is replaced by others loyal to the new regime. I am convinced that this is what stopped wholesale MSB breaking, although small level destruction works continued for a time. This was confirmed in an interview with journalist and tour guide Kristina Fidhi, who recalled three cases after 2013 where local police were called to prevent people breaking MSBs in the Drino Valley (KF, 10.07.17). Even though the official outlook and attitudes had changed with a new government, by this time most MSBs across the landscape had been destroyed. Those which remain today are located on private land, in places where permissions were not granted, and at military installations.

Although MSB removals along the Drino Valley were not contested in any legal or meaningful manner, their destruction methods caused issues, particularly on agricultural land as only metalwork and rear tunnel segments were removed for re-use. There was no standardised approach to breaking up MSBs with machines. MSBs would be uprooted directly or dug out using the machine bucket, meaning they could be broken down as a pile on nearby ground.
This practice was noted on the 2015 ASIG orthoimages (see Chapter 3) by rectangular lines of white rubble in fields adjacent to where MSBs had been removed. Lifting out MSBs in this way left a void, which sometimes perfectly reflected the MSB-body shape (Figure 94). This reinforced the presence of the MSB, even though it is now absent; transformed into innumerable shards of sharp concrete close to its former siting.

During a Drino Valley taxi journey in 2012, the driver told me that he was not sorry to see MSBs destroyed because they are associated with war and for Albania, that is all finished now. His only regret was that the Drino Valley fields were now infected with concrete. The reduction of the MSB form down to rubble enabled these once near-hidden relics to become visible as their broken white-grey concrete was left to glare up along field edges and hillsides. Visually, this abundance of surface concrete rubble was temporary; some was removed as hardcore, but most was left to grow over once again.

Figure 94: Type 1 MSB void after extraction, Drino Valley plain, 2011 (© Mirgen Shametaj)
Four years after MSB breaking on the Drino Valley plain had concluded, I observed that farmers had not gained any additional workable land, rather, it was just the opposite. The rubble footprint of broken concrete was greater than the space taken up previously by in-tact MSB installations, meaning they were given a wider birth during ploughing and harvesting (Figure 95). The destroyed MSB now has a broader, yet more immaterial, presence within the lived landscape of the Drino Valley than it ever had previously. This re-demarcation through destruction for Hoxha’s Cold War defensive strategies reinforces the absent presence of the bunker and the irreversible nature of this rift in the social life of these objects (Buchli and Lucas 2001; Meyer 2012: 109).

As noted on the Ksamil Peninsula (see Chapter 4), prefabricated rear box-tunnel segments appear to have been valued more for their useful size and sturdy shape rather than any steel that could be extracted and sold as scrap. From 2012, field surveys for this thesis
observed several batches of MSB tunnel elements across the Drino Valley, clearly intended for re-use. During a walkover around the foothills of Sofratikë village, a large stockpile of MSB tunnel parts (Figure 96) was in the process of being used to construct a nearby roadside building platform (Figure 97).

Similar re-use was observed in 2017 at the village of Arshi Lengo, where tunnel parts had been used as hillside revetments to create terraces for parking and gardens (Figure 98). Across the agricultural plain, a more collective re-use sentiment was observed where the hollow form of these tunnel segments has been employed to create drainage ditch crossings.

![Figure 96: Stockpile of rear MSB tunnel segments near Sofratikë village, Drino Valley, 2012 (© author)](image-url)
The scale of the 2011–2013 MSB breaking caused the separation of thousands of these objects into their constituent parts and materials. This industrial process was far beyond any previous bunker destruction works occurring after the collapse of communism. Whole MSBs
were separated out, parts removed, then broken back down into metal and concrete for re-use, recycling or left as waste. If MSBs can be considered as social agents of Hoxha under communism (Gell 1998: 20–21; see Chapter 3), then this breaking and separating treatment must demonstrate a ‘re-distributed’ extension of this personhood concept. In this way, reprocessed and salvaged MSBs parts and materials have been dispersed unconsciously across the present landscape of Albamodernity as unintentional social agents of Hoxha’s paranoia. The destruction of MSBs is not their end, nor the close of their materiality. Cold War remnants such as these can never truly be obliterated, only recycled, and repurposed towards the progression of a twenty-first century Albania.

Touristification of MSBs: 1992–Present

The former heavy visual presence of MSBs in the Drino Valley means they have been perceived and treated as a collective entity within post-communist tourism initiatives. This differs to the Ksamil Peninsula, where a greater individuality in re-use narratives was encountered and impacted on how these structures were engaged with (see Chapter 4). Being an agricultural area, the most common re-use function for MSBs on the Drino Plain has been functional as shelter for shepherds or farmers, and as storage in villages along valley edges (Figure 99). Fieldwork across the Drino Valley did not observe any MSBs painted decoratively, the only colour noted on caps was political graffiti on roadside installations that promoted parties during elections.
Aside from MSBs positioned on private land, most installations investigated during this research were impacted by the 2011–2013 breaking activity across the Drino Valley. This has reduced the potential for future physical engagements by visitors, added to which, the remaining Type 4 MSBs in the landscape may not conform to expectations gained from reading popular media about Albania. In Berlin, McWilliams found that tourists had similar preconceived notions about how the Wall should look from seeing imagery contemporary to its being in operation (2013: 42). For Albania, this idea is particularly reinforced when visitors enter the Drino Valley through the Muzinë Pass from Sarandë, which was once one of the most impressive sights for tourists (see Figure 91). As a collective entity, these MSBs had a compelling visual agency that articulated the scale to which Albania was militarised under Hoxha.

The loss of MSBs in the Drino Valley was lamented by tour guide Edvin Lance (EL), as the view from the Muzinë Pass had been one of his main tour highlights. In his opinion, showing
tourists such dense lines of MSBs in the landscape helped him explain Albanian communism to
visitors and contextualise how life was for people (EL, 08.04.17). Ilir Parangoni (IP) noted many
changes to communist landscapes during five years of guiding visitors around Albania. He told
me that tourists expected to see MSBs in places like the Drino Valley because of what they had
read in their guidebooks.

Regarding MSB breaking, IP would explain to visitors that this was done for financial
reasons and because Albanians are indifferent about bunkers; they were part of the past (IP,
10.04.17). Heritage professional IN-9 explained that while he felt no nostalgia towards
communism, he could see the cultural heritage value of bunkers. The only place he thought
MSBs should not have been destroyed for metal extraction was along the Drino Valley, because
these relatively new monuments to Albanian life complimented the old to illustrate the diverse
history in this area (IN-9, 18.07.12).

Kristina Fidhi (KF) guides tours on horseback around rural Drino Valley areas and
explained how she thought that MSB breaking in this area had not adversely affected tourism.
The visitor interest is still there and as most foreigners do not know the full extent of what was
once in the landscape, they are still impressed by what they see. Like IN-9, KF is not nostalgic
for communism in any way but understands that visitors are curious and feels the best way for
them to find out the truth is to talk to Albanians. To KF, the realities of communism have not
been addressed by the government nor are represented in any meaningful way within
museums.

Regarding MSB souvenirs, KF recognised their popularity but considered that they do
not embody the positivity that a gift should encapsulate. Despite an acknowledgement that
tourists have a different, and often shallower, sense of perception than locals, she considered
that such MSB replications contribute towards a link between Albanians and the ‘worst story
that they have ever lived’:

We cannot be represented by this symbol, it can be there and tell that specific story, but
we have many better and more positive symbols to be represented by. Of course, it is part
of the story, but it is a very sad story. A sad story which is not told correctly yet. For many
years we have taken a certain distance from that time and not allowed ourselves to speak
about communism ... now, probably we are now ready to have a look to that truth (KF,
10.04.17).
The more positive symbols KF feels Albania could use have pre-communist era associations with the national hero Skanderbeg, traditional crafts, and hospitality. Despite this, KF appreciates that MSBs are a useful prompt for visitors to open a dialogue about the recent past. She said most of the MSBs she remembered as a child have now gone, but this was not a bad thing because ‘we need just some to remember, but not everything to scare us’ (KF, 10.04.17).

MSBs remain in less accessible areas the Drino Valley landscape where the cost of labour, time and transportation has been calculated as higher than the potential value of their steel content (IN-9, 18.07.12). This is the case on the Çajupi Plain (see above), where Type 5 MSBs with a low metal content are still extant in the landscape (Figure 100). During a field visit in 2017, I interviewed Andrea Kristo (AK) who discussed his plans to restore two Type 5 MSBs adjacent to his eco-hostel so that foreign visitors could experience the communist past. He added that this would also be educational for younger Albanians and members of the diaspora.
who, ‘never lived through those years, so these will explain some of the story’ (AK, 11.04.17).

AK’s intentions were to clean out access tunnels and interiors, rebuild collapsed walls and cover up exterior graffiti with whitewash. He hoped to furnish the interior with soldiers uniforms, helmets and wooden replicas of Karabiner guns and rifles, which he would make himself, because even deactivated ones are no longer allowed by the government (AK, 11.04.17). To the best of my knowledge, these plans have not yet been realised but the consideration of MSB touristification on such a local level illustrates how the perception of Cold War heritage has been driven by a foreign fascination.

Since the fall of communism, Albania’s most popular tourist souvenir has been the MSB shaped ashtray or pencil holder. It is not clear exactly when these were initiated, or indeed why, but were discussed by Galaty et al (1999: 203) in the context of their late-1990s fieldwork. In my own investigations of Gjirokastër’s tourist areas, various shops were visited to explore what MSB related objects were for sale. By far, ashtrays were the most numerous, made from marble, plastic, ceramic, or resin with a price range of 3–7 Euros (Figure 101). These are produced or distributed from factories and warehouses in Tiranë, Durres and Krujë, all cities north of Gjirokastër (EL, 08.04.17; LB, 10.04.17). MSBs also featured on postcards and as souvenir paperweights, penholders, fridge magnets or generic solid ornaments.

Figure 101: Selection of MSB ashtray products bought in Gjirokastër tourist shops, 0.15m scale, 2017 (© author)
Stonemason Muhedin Makri (MM) uses a local grey stone which is embedded within traditional histories of Gjirokastër as the ‘City of Stone’ and represents qualities of strength and power. Since the late-2000s MM has used this stone to make MSB shaped ashtrays which are sold in his shop for 10–15 Euros each (Figure 101). During our interview he told me that although he makes MSB ashtrays for tourists, he was inspired to do so through the memories of his time training around MSBs as a reservist. He explained that despite the hard times of communism, everybody had a job which made people more equal and willing to assist each other. MM was trained as a metalworker under communism and feels proud that everything he made was used within Albania, whereas now most articles are imported because those industries have gone (MM, 09.04.17).

Figure 102: Stone MSB ashtrays made by stonemason Muhedin Makri in Gjirokastër, 0.15m scale, 2017 (© author)

When preparing MSB ashtrays, MM said he felt nostalgic for communism and thought about stories from his army training time and the people he was with. In MM’s opinion his
traditional Gjirokastër stone MSB ashtrays were more unique than similar MSB souvenirs found in tourist shops. He explained that this was because his solid stone reflected the true robust character of MSBs. MM has taught his grandson to make MSB ashtrays but believes that he prepares the stone object in a different manner because he does not hold the memories of that time. MM told me that in his heart, he knows and feels what an MSB was and how things were in Albania at that time, meaning he can put these qualities into his MSB ashtrays; something which cannot be replicated by his grandson (MM, 09.04.17).

For 15 years Lubiana Bajoa (LB) has worked with the Gjirokastër artisan craft programme which uses traditional folk culture, handicrafts, history, and monuments of culture to promote the city to tourists. She noticed that visitors were interested in MSBs along the Drino Valley and thought that as a defining feature of the recent past, they could be promoted through souvenir production. One output of this was MM’s production of stone MSB ashtrays which linked traditional artisan skills to Gjirokastër as the City of Stone. LB feels that MM’s stone ashtrays are more authentic for tourists when compared to cheaper, generic marble or plastic MSB souvenirs, but that their heavier weight dissuades people from buying them (LB, 10.04.17).

In 2013, LB ran a project called ‘GiroArt Artisan Women’ where local craftswomen created products from recycled materials to promote Gjirokastër. The aim was to make items that were functional as well as decorative, so they would be bought by visitors and locals at the market and in their shop. One of the product lines made 30 bags, purses, aprons, and small laptop bags from surplus post-communist military trousers featuring an MSB logo on the front (Figure 103). LB thought the camouflaged material and MSB complemented each other to create something unique and modern that could easily be promoted.

Most women involved in the project had lived experience of communism, and LB said while making these bags they talked about their memories of doing preparation for war training (‘Zbore’) and being shown how to shoot guns. The local reaction to having an MSB logo on bags was not a negative one, because they had created a recycled material brand-style which ran through many GiroArt products to promote Gjirokastër. LB explained that the MSB was chosen over other bunker types because it is the most famous, more presentable, and she was not clear how she could promote a tunnel. (LB, 10.04.17).
Concluding Comments

The Ottoman architecture of the Drino Valley had a traditional focus on individual fortress houses as protection for extended family groups. This changed from the mid-twentieth century after the onset of the Cold War when the nationalist idea of collective protection for the whole country was promoted. This was further pressed into the population when the MSB bunkerisation programme was initiated in the late-1960s. The raw materials for early MSBs and the prefabricated elements for later models were collected and manufactured on the outskirts of Gjirokastër city. These were installed across the Drino Valley in dense clusters and lines to create a heavily militarised MSB landscape which reflected the invasion vulnerability felt by the topography of the Albanian-Greek border.

MSBs are a tangible expression Albania’s communist history and as such are imbued
with the ideology of that era. Furthermore, as non-portable articles of material culture, they endured for a long time in the landscape of post-socialist Albania and maintained a powerful legacy towards the psyche of the present. These ideological ties demonstrated the extent to which the communist dictatorship managed to manipulate individual and collective identities of Albanian people through the landscape to impose its ideological vision. Even in their ruinous states, both the Gjirokastër factory and the MSBs produced in it have been shown to have real material and ideological effects on persons and social relations meaning they play a role in the present as historical objects of identity (Tilley 2006: 18).

Those involved in the MSB breaking of 2011–2013 redressed the financial balance of history. Under communism, the MSB programme extracted national wealth from people though hard labour, time, and their mental health. This combined with the finances and political concessions involved to source raw materials, equipment and designs added up to an incalculably high debt owed to the Albanian people. In part, this has now been financially repatriated by breaking up MSBs and selling or using profitable parts. The same MSB components and materials that once exemplified Hoxha’s paranoia have now been hybridized for commercial reasons.

MSBs once symbolised the limits placed on internal mobilities and frontier restrictions of the Drino Valley, but this role has changed as the area has become more internally and internationally accessible. The MSB form and shape have developed into an identifiable logo that has been recommodified and directed towards the tourist economy, sitting alongside more traditional local products. This has extended the social life of these objects in a conceptual manner which is diverse and means that unlike on the Ksamil Peninsula, the story of MSBs in the Drino Valley is not yet complete.

In comparison to the new town of Ksamil, the Drino Valley study area appears to contain a greater depth of connection between people, place, and traditional history. This is reflected by a wider comprehension and acceptance in the Drino Valley that the integration of communist era material towards tourism reflects it being the most recent layer of Albania’s history. The lack of settlement continuity on the Ksamil Peninsula has clearly had implications for how local people perceive their own history. For Ksamil, this is short and lacks landscape tradition which, along with its coastal location, has created a modern economic focus that relies on classical Butrint and beaches to attract tourists.
Chapter 6

Discussion and Analytical Conclusions

Introduction

A history of foreign occupation and domination made Albania susceptible to a communist leadership who placed defence and independence at the forefront of its ideologies. Through the formation of a strict centralised regime, territorial integrity was retained and Hoxha’s extreme measures of xenophobia and nationalism were used to forge a new internal sense of identity. The physical expression of this paranoid ideology was reflected within the militarised MSB landscapes of Albania. The legacy of these structures lies primarily within their symbolism towards the country’s turbulent history and nationalistic approach to self-preservation. MSBs are the ultimate expression of Hoxha’s contested legacy and desire to keep Albania for the Albanians.

At the collapse of communism, MSBs across the Albanian landscape were a pervasive reinforced concrete representation of communism and of the dictator. The distinct robust attributes of these structures permitted them to survive the ferocity of a people-led iconoclastic destruction of state symbols in the wake of the communist system’s collapse (Hall 1999: 168; Hall 2001: 110; de Waal 2004: 21). They endured to survive a decade of turbulent transition, anarchy and war that was Albania’s route towards democracy (Jarvis 2000: 16), only for most to end up destroyed across a three-year ‘Skrapomania’ breaking frenzy. The tangible historical presence afforded by MSBs has allowed them to endure in the consciousness of all Albanians as a shared reminder of the extent to which the population was physically, psychologically, and culturally controlled by Hoxha.

The case studies exploring the Ksamil Peninsula and the Drino Valley have demonstrated how the MSB endured as an artefact of modern conflict for over 50 years in both the landscape and psyche of Albania. For half of this time these objects served to reinforce a Cold War mentality of xenophobic paranoia. This was articulated to the population through propaganda and education and visually communicated via the brute MSB form and sheer quantity. This
ensured that the other half of their life-history has been as an object tolerated with suspicious unease until intermittent functional re-uses gave way to more active engagements.

**Remembering and Forgetting**

The post-communist political tone for dismissing bunkers was set by Sali Berisha, the first freely elected democratic head of state for 53 years who used his inauguration speech to denounce Hoxha and the previous regime (see Chapter 3, Sullivan 1992 as quoted in Hall 1994: 153). In a 1996 interview, Mrs Zilije Luga, then 55-years-old, recalled the installation of two MSBs outside her house in the 1970s. Mrs Luga stated that back then she thought it was crazy, but knew that she could not complain as any resistance would see her marked out as a dissenter against the motherland and sent to jail. When asked how she viewed these same structures five years after the fall of communism, she reflected that “I see these bunkers, and I think about Enver Hoxha” (Shenon 1996).

The avowal of having a prior comprehension of the suppressive role of MSBs within the psychological landscape of Albania has also been noted in research by Galaty et al (1999) in the late 1990s. They found that most Albanians described bunkers as symbols of repression and control rather than of nationalist unity but would insist that they had always considered them as such. However, this belief was noted as being a difficult perspective to substantiate after the passing of time. The terms ‘disharmony’, ‘useless’, ‘strange’ and ‘wasteful’ were answers given by Albanians to the informally posed question ‘What do bunkers mean to you?’ (Galaty et al 1999: 203).

Research into nostalgia within post-communist Eastern Europe has referred to a retrospective yearning amongst those who have lived through periods of socialist rule. This has revealed a wish to invest those former lives with ‘meaning and dignity, not to be thought of, remembered, or bemoaned as losers or “slaves”’ (Todorova 2012: 7). For Albanians, exposure to global processes during the 1990s transition revealed the true extent to which their country was impoverished and inadequate (Hall 1999: 167; Hall 2001:110). It is perhaps understandable that hitherto Albanians have been unwilling to confront their own naiveties under communism, particularly when situated within the diffuse ‘cultural amnesia’ afforded by the capitalist present
The desire to disregard and denounce aspects of what had gone before led to the inevitable reappraisal of MSBs, namely as Hoxha’s oppressive and paranoid folly. During his 2001–2003 examination of post-communist forgetting in northern Albania, Littlewood (2009) illustrated how the village of Derret i Vogël subjected all forms of communist constructions to practical neglect. Buildings and collective enterprises from the Hoxha period, the central municipal area of the village and a great number of concrete bunkers, all of which had been subject to varying levels of burning and destruction during the communist collapse, had been disregarded and left to decay and grow over with weeds. During his time in the village, Littlewood observed that, despite these relics of the recent past being more than apparent, the local population saw through them as if they were not there. They were not commented on in public and Littlewood’s questions were dismissed with an awkward ‘that’s nothing — it’s from the old days’.

There was little comprehension in the village that any communist structure could have remained economically useful for the future (Littlewood 2009: 124). This process was interpreted by Littlewood as a necessary and understandable first stage by which the community could forget devalued concepts and practices as families attempted a return to an idealised pre-communist past (ibid.: 115–116). The cataclysmic downfall of nearly fifty years of totalitarianism had shattered the self-image of many Albanians and left a vacuum with no unifying vision of the country or what it meant to be Albanian (Standish 2002: 123). For people to manage an advance it was necessary to physically, and psychologically, elide the substance of communism, including Hoxha’s MSB legacy.

Littlewood’s case study demonstrates how for a long while after the fall of communism, bunkers existed in Albania’s landscape, but they were just not ‘seen’ anymore — they had ‘become’ the landscape. ‘It [the bunker] nestles in the uninterrupted expanse of the landscape and disappears from our perception, used as we are to bearings and markers” (Virilio 1994: 44). This could go some way towards an explanation of the psychological process involved in Albania and why it was that those same ubiquitous MSBs that were forcibly thrust into the landscape under communism, were so easily ignored after the fall of the regime. Albanians no longer wanted these concrete mushrooms, or more specifically what they embodied, to be part of their present or future, but were unable to physically remove them from their locale. Individual and collective responses to Albania’s Cold War legacies are important to consider. As Moshenska
has stated: ‘An archaeology of remembering must acknowledge the necessity of forgetting’ (Moshenska 2009: 48); for Albania total amnesia has not yet been an option and any forgetting has been only superficial.

Iacono and Këlliçi’s study into the significance of communist heritage in contemporary Albania notes that aspects other than trauma and pain need to be considered when examining Cold War relics. They acknowledged that former Eastern Bloc dictatorship material legacies are often cited as a heritage that is ‘unwanted’ and ‘difficult’ to negotiate, but that this view is a generalisation. To fully comprehend such heritage of the recent past, the specificities of each socio-historical context need consideration alongside a suitable examination of the present situation of each country (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015: 97).

In Poland, research into memories of socialism have revealed that people remember having a sense of pride in production and in their physical efforts directed towards a greater-good to modernise the country (Todorova 2012: 5). In Albania’s case, MSBs were a collective creation involving military personnel and civilians as part of the national movement towards isolationism, the bleakest phase of the country’s Cold War. Iacono and Këlliçi suggested that this depth of engagement had a major impact on why bunkers were attributed a particular importance by the over 60s during a survey on dictatorship heritage in current Albanian society (Iacono and Këlliçi 2015: 109). Although the questionnaire was targeted towards those in the capital city of Tiranë, this affiliation towards bunkers revealed the powerful and enduring agency of these structures, nearly twenty-five years after the fall of the regime.

Cultural Biographies of MSBs

Some of the earliest foreign MSB biographical stories were cultivated by visitors to Albania after the 1978 split with China. These provide key insights into how a newly isolated and recently bunkerised Albania dealt with the paradox of having a xenophobic outlook while desiring tourist currency.

The French Film director Jean Bertolino visited Albania four times between 1976 and 1977 to make an Albanian state-sanctioned film about the country and wrote a book about his experience. On his final trip, while oblivious to declining relations between Tiranë and Peking,
he commented on there being fewer Chinese people and ‘the new and quirky bunkers’ all across the landscape, ‘denting the ground surface as an outbreak of spots’. When Bertolino queried his escort-guide about these, he was told in semi-jest: ‘your eyes can’t properly see … they are not boils, they are watermelons … enjoy their glistening’ (Bertolino 1979: 125).

Bertolino also witnessed the construction of tunnel bunkers near the archaeological site of Apollonia in Fieri and was told they were a ‘military secret’ when he enquired about them. Being unaware of the political situation between Albania and China, Bertolino felt he was ‘the witness of a collective psychosis, both ordinary and worrying’ and that this intensity of defensive work would make the most innocent landscape look just the opposite (ibid.: 127).

The centralised control over tourists visiting Albania was strict, with lists of demands and conformities laid down in advance of arrival. In practice, and on a more localised level, tolerance towards visitors was more flexible. In 1980 Christopher Richardson visited Albania with Regent Tours and captured footage on his Quartz M cine camera which he later transferred to digital and uploaded to YouTube (https://youtu.be/IQv9ND4FGaw). He was not prevented from filming but recalled that military installations were on the list of sensitive subjects they were not allowed to photograph. Despite this, Richardson captured MSBs in fields along the Shkodër to Lezhë road from mid-way along his tour bus and remembers that water buffalo were used to move concrete elements. Overall, he considered the supervision of his tour group to be more relaxed than expected but acknowledged that his bus-filming probably went unnoticed by the driver and two guides at the front (2020, pers. comm. 28 April).

In 1983, Eric Newby visited Albania on a similar tour and noted that everywhere they went ‘countless thousands of concrete mushrooms sprang from the ground … [which] were still being prefabricated at a furious rate’ (Newby 1984: 119). According to Newby, the rear of the bus was deliberately left dusty to prevent photographs being taken, leaving his fellow passengers to take covert snaps from the side windows (ibid.: 121). After viewing and probably photographing communist fortifications from the archaeological site of Apollonia, Newby was questioned by the coach driver who revealed himself to be a government agent whose job it was to keep tourists out of jail (ibid.: 131–133).

More intangible MSB cultural biographies existed for Albania after the fall of communism which derived from their communist use as toilets and their closed off nature. The idea that such secret conflict places conceal illicit behaviour is the driving factor for moral
concerns about what goes on in these inhabited spaces (Moshenska 2019: 93). In Albania, it was the more adult use of MSBs during the 1990s which saw their perception as being not only unclean but immoral places that decent Albanian people had no reason to be inside. Under communism, Hoxha used Marxist-Leninist emancipation policies to shift Albania away from traditional patriarchal ideas. The vacuum left after the collapse of communist state structures, however, led Albanian cultural behaviour to retreat into the familiarity and safety of patriarchy (Vullnetari and King 2014: 143). Any negative connotations attached to MSBs were projected almost exclusively against women. In 2008, I was told that misogynistic expressions existed during Albania’s early transition years which personified the grime and depravity of MSBs:

If a girl is dirty, they say: ‘She’s a girl that goes in bunkers’, or ‘We saw that girl in a bunker’ it means she’s a bitch [harlot]. If somebody wanted to punish you morally, they would say: ‘Come on, you’re a lady that goes into bunkers’. (IN-5, 23.06.08).

The physical MSB had become symbolically linked to socio-cultural standards that determined who was a decent or sullied person by their engagement with these concrete relics. According to Tilley (2006: 61), material forms are the medium though which societal values and ideas constantly change to produce differing identities in an active process that transforms over time. Thus, through MSB agency drawing on deeper social meanings, a moral landscape was superimposed over a decaying one of communist conflict. This relatively short-lived layer of morality demonstrates the intertwined and multi-dimensional nature of people to bunker and how changes have occurred over time from communism through to present. When my own MSB fieldwork started in 2008 I was fortunate that the potency of this moral and intangible landscape had evaporated.

Opinions articulated in the post-communist present, as to whether people had perceived Hoxha’s bunkerisation programme as a necessary means of defence, should be viewed with a degree of caution. Albania became uniquely isolated in 1978 after a series of failed partnerships with larger countries, and it was during this period of self-reliance that the country has been regarded as behaving in a bizarre manner. Primarily, this was related to Hoxha’s xenophobic and paranoid stance towards the outside world. Galaty et al have attributed this position to a collective psychological impact on Albania from millennia of repeated invasions that resulted in cultural and political domination, and suffering (2009: 172).
The Cold War belief shared by Hoxha and the Albanian people that the country should progress as an independent nation has, beyond the fall of communism, remained a binding factor between dictator and population. This has been suggested as the main reason for the absence of jokes regarding Hoxha or communist Albania in the years since 1991, which has been taken as indicative of a collective refusal to vilify the dictator and his work under communism. This, apparently, is a unique phenomenon within the context of post-communist Europe (Woodcock 2007: 62).

Hoxha instigated the MSB programme, but it was the Albanian people who manufactured the reinforced concrete elements, transported the parts, prepared the ground, fitted the installation, and maintained them in the landscape. This collective level of responsibility for MSBs coupled with the shared goals of nationalism indicates a deeply entrenched and emotional interrelationship between subjects (people), objects (bunker) and the landscape. Even defensive structures located in the most remote of areas have a collective agency towards the memory of Hoxha and communist life.

As time passed, this influence shifted to encompass narratives of post-communism, which included engagements and exchanges forged through conscious action or derived from everyday routine. Thus, seemingly inert bunker objects can be seen to have social-lives (Appadurai 1986), which anthropomorphises their relationships with people, chiefly at the level of the individual. This emphasis on the singular is important because it creates a specific object identity which is localised, particular and precise (Hoskins 2006: 78), as opposed to generic and globalised, from which cultural biographies can be formed. These awkward relations have persisted in the psyche of Albanians beyond the death of Hoxha and the collapse of communism; however, times and perceptions have changed, existing bunker narratives have been reworked and new stories written.

Engaging the Albanian Diaspora

From the 2000s, Albanian MSBs increasingly became the topic of conceptual and applied forms of engagement within artistic, architectural, and theoretical projects. What is particularly interesting is that most of these cogently creative endeavours have been initiated by ethnic
Albanians whose families migrated from Albania and Kosovo during the post-communist exodus. Having grown up abroad in places such as Canada, Switzerland, United States of America, Italy and Germany, these members of the Albanian diaspora were able to develop a more progressive and holistic world view.

In Macdonald’s discussions of post-socialist nostalgia, she has noted that for most people, the demise of socialism should be viewed as a positive chapter. However, as she points out, the rise of nostalgia for aspects of this period is a surprising phenomenon that is shared not only by those who ‘escaped’ it, but also those who lived through it (Macdonald 2013: 99). This is reflected in Albania where members of the diaspora and Albanians have worked together to produce imaginative engagements that are centred on the MSB.

As part of their Landscape Architecture MA in Milan, Elian Stefa and Gyler Mydyti launched the Concrete Mushrooms project in 2008. Through this assignment they aimed to raise awareness and revitalise mushroom-shaped bunkers by repurposing them for the twenty-first century (Stefa and Mydyti 2012: 16). It was proposed that all of Albania’s bunker types could be re-engaged with a minimal, yet sustainable, level of conversion to benefit locals and tourists alike. Their designs demonstrated that individual and grouped mushroom-shaped bunkers could be incorporated into camping pitches, transformed into public toilets, or utilised as kiosks (ibid.: 118).

Stefa and Mydyti’s Concrete Mushrooms project continued beyond the scope of what was required to attain their university qualifications and developed into a platform for bunker-related debates and creative collaborations (Stefa and Mydyti 2012: 16). Many of these works were produced by other researchers from the Albanian diaspora with support from Albanian partners and NGOs. Sculptor Niku Alex Mucaj created an installation called ‘Converscene’ from three overturned mushroom-bunker caps laid in a line with a cemented platform poured over the top. This was built in the outdoor area of the Tirana Ekspres contemporary art gallery as an open-air theatre stage as a modern-day Agora for artistic expressions to support the democratic process and stimulate discussion (ibid.: 150). Mucaj’s ‘overthrowing’ of the MSB was to demonstrate the physical transformation of the object, from monolithic relic to provocative sculpture, and is a direct incitement for Albanians to confront, rather than ignore these ubiquitous structures.

Olia Miho, another architecture student of the diaspora, created the semi-fictional
‘Concrete Cathedrals’ design project as an unconventional memorial to Albania’s communist past. This took some of the worst aspects of Albania’s regime to an exaggerated level of sci-fi fantasy expressed through a collage novel. In this version of events, the dictator’s home-grown MSBs were made indestructible by an orbiting membrane. The plan failed when a new leader (Sali Berisha) caused the ground to vibrate and the mushroom-shaped bunkers flew off into the sky, leaving only peace and commercialisation (Miho 2012: 114). This fantastic historical reinterpretation was an attempt to uncover meaning, but also reflects the socio-political relationship between science fiction and Cold War technologies in the sealed bunker of Albania where absolutely anything would have been believed (Figure 104).

Bunkerfest was founded by Zhujeta Cima in 2010 as an attempt to ‘spread the love’ for Albanian bunkers by hosting a weekend of camping, music, and fun in and around these structural relics. Her motivation for this was to ‘convert the shabby side of the story into something positive’ (Hopkins 2014), which is reflected by the MSB shape within the project logo. Bunkerfest was held for four consecutive years and aimed to engage people from a range of
backgrounds who would inspire creativity and social cohesion (Stefa and Mydyti 2012: 176). These events temporarily converted Albania’s militarised landscape for an internationally diverse and ‘artistic’ twenty-first century audience (Figure 105).

![Figure 105: A very social engagement — BunkerFest 2, near Tirana, 2012 (©Manila Harizi)](image)

PZ bunkers became dance tents hosting DJ’s while embrasures became serving hatches for food and drink. Between MSBs, BunkerFest T-shirts for sale were strung out on lines tied to lifting loops protruding out of the concrete caps. The main stage was situated up some short steps that led to the platform of a dilapidated Lapidar. From here, bands played against the backdrop of an obelisk and rear wall that displayed the shadow remnant of a communist slogan. Bunkerfest revellers experienced a blend of past, present and future with interactive entertainment through light-shows, fire jugglers and dancing while a Red Bull ‘soft drinks’ tent provided the energy to make it through the weekend. This explicit demonstration of Albamodernity transformed a localised Albanian communist landscape into a Western-focused place of free speech. Of all bunker re-engagement projects, Bunkerfest is likely to be the one that Hoxha would have disapproved of most.
Roland Littlewood paraphrased Daniel Dennett by stating that post-communist Albania was situated within a state of ‘Stalinist forgetting’. Forgoing the past was utilised as a mechanism to advance the village of Derret i Vogël by using pre-communist societal memories (Littlewood 2009: 116). These individual and collective memories embody and rework history to enable people to move forwards, yet backwards, to negotiate beyond the Hoxha-era (ibid.: 114). As time has passed, there are less people in Albania with a memory bridge that stretches back to, and spans, the pre-communist and early Hoxha periods. This has resulted in a reduction in meaning, materiality and emotional involvement towards the ideas and attitudes of that time (Saunders 2001a: 477). This same principle now applies towards younger generations of Albanians, particularly those who possess an Albamodernity attitude, who are reworking their own history to negotiate their future.

The pasts of Albania’s younger generation span the late-1980s to the early post-communist period and it is primarily this group that has utilised the MSB as an artistic tool through re-engagement and re-commodification. Interestingly, the recent upsurge in Albanian interaction with MSBs was largely initiated by the Albanian diaspora and subsequently taken up by local Albanians. The most recent example of this was undertaken in June 2020, when six Type 2 MSBs in the Llogara National Park, near Vlorë were painted as ‘Emojis’ (Figure 106). This was a collaboration between the National Park, tour company Albanian Trip, artist Eri Daka and CELIM, an Italian NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation). This was conceptualised to provoke MSBs with high-capitalism through the Emoji ‘language’ and spread a positive message within the context of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. This eye catching and anthropomorphic repurposing of the MSB personifies its spirit as a Child of Two Worlds. It is through MSB engagements like this that Albanians are moving forward by referencing their pasts, whether real, learned or imagined, which contributes towards the phenomenon of nostalgia.
As one of the most obvious symbols of Hoxha and the Albanian communist period, the mushroom-shaped bunker is centrally positioned towards evoking memories and potentially overriding wider issues regarding cultural amnesia. The level to which the population was involved in Albania’s bunkerisation, the sheer number of objects and their overall uniqueness, within the sphere of former Soviet and Eastern Bloc countries, is what sets MSBs apart from other communist forms in a country already defined by its history as inimitable.

**Communist Heritage Tourism and MSBs**

In 2007, there was a recognition within Albanian tourism planners that communist heritage could be capitalised on to feed the Western curiosity towards the country’s unusual history (Suri 2007). Rather than maintain the overriding psychological stance of ignoring Albania’s concrete defences and architecture of socialism, it was suggested that these relics could be foregrounded for profit. This was an outward facing plan that could sell aspects of post-Second World War Albania to inquisitive foreigners, the very sector that the country had been indoctrinated to
reject. Within the context of tourist development, MSBs were singled out as a ‘trademark’ of the Albanian landscape that signify a chilling but fascinating sign of an obscure political history (Dujisin 2007: 13).

However, there are drawbacks to this type of campaign, particularly when the construction of new post-communist identities become frustrated by nostalgia and where that country fails to present the more progressive aspects of itself to visitors (Light 2000: 158). For Albania, promoting the legacies of communism has become a self-perpetuating reflection of the recent past. Tourists who already had an awareness of the country’s short-term history are attracted to visit while a new audience is built by those who become interested whilst in the country.

Cold War relics can be classed as cultural assets which possess a tangible atmosphere that can be drawn out by any visitor who experiences them (Schofield 2004: 202). This means that a full understanding of Albania’s communist history is not required to experience and engage with MSBs. Although, the need to comprehend ‘the story behind the thing’ may go some way to explain the level to which non-Albanians and tourists have developed a degree of fascination with MSBs.

Objects which have no particular importance or value fixed to them by local people can often be regarded as significant or meaningful characteristics of some form of identity to outsiders (Thomas 1991 as quoted in Tilley 2006: 70). The differential tourist-local viewpoint towards the symbolic value of an object is a common conception when the terms ‘culture’ and ‘history’ become more or less synonymous (Rowlands 2002: 126) For example to Berlin visitors; the Wall is the defining feature of the capital, whereas to inhabitants of the city, it is not (Baker 1993: 720).

This scenario is repeated in Albania, where to Albanians it is not the MSB but the double-headed eagle on the national flag which is the emblem of their country. Despite this, innovative Albanians have unwittingly reinforced an icon by producing MSB souvenirs for consumption. Domed marble ashtrays and penholders or T-shirts and bags that exhibit the MSB cap convey a national cultural meaning toward this form as being uniquely Albanian.

Ultimately, these function in a similar way to more obvious artefacts collected by tourists as symbols of a nation’s identity. For example, models of the Eiffel Tower symbolise France and tartan objects signify Scotland (Edensor 2002: 113). Once the MSB object is removed from
Albania it is recontextualised within a new spatial environment as a keep-sake in a foreign home (ibid.: 114) and has the potential to displace the memory of a holiday experience. Subsequent narratives regarding Albania could be allowed to focus on the memento as the authentic point of reference to the visit (Stewart 1984: 135). This object signifying and referencing a person’s foreign trip demonstrates Kristina Fidhi’s point about the negativity of MSB replications towards the modern-day perception of Albania and Albanians (see Chapter 5).

The recent widespread MSB re-commodification through destruction could potentially leave visitors with a sense of disappointment at the lack of concrete domes dotted around Albania’s landscape. This revelation would be particularly disheartening if the trip had been informed by sources on the internet which seems mostly to contain lazy journalism and travelogues that continue to cite the proliferation of MSBs across Albania. However, not all recent MSB engagements have been negative and involved destruction. The potential for saving bunkers through tourism was recently demonstrated in Sarandë, where urban expansion over the past ten years, particularly along hillsides, has obliterated many MSB installations.

During road widening through the town centre a Type 1 MSB was exposed below a garden. This was examined during 2017 fieldwork and recorded photographically on the assumption that it would soon be removed and broken up. However, this was not the case. The municipal government, formed of the ruling Socialist Party, took the decision to transform it into a small tourist attraction, known as ‘Memorje 78’, meaning ‘Memory of 1978’, the date of completion as evidenced by graffiti scored into cap finishing render (Figure 107).

![Figure 107: Memorje 78 MSB, Sarandë, before and after touristification, 2017—2018 (©author and Erjona Qilla)](image)
The MSB and surrounding area were tidied up, landscaped with grass, a new retaining wall and steps leading down to the rear entrance. The entrance has a gate, meaning internal access is not normally permitted, but an information panel inside shows images of MSBs and domed artillery bunkers taken from the Concrete Mushrooms (2008/9) project. My assumptions had been wrong, and I was pleasantly surprised at this retention, particularly as I had explored this MSB when it was first unearthed and presumed it would not be around for long. The Mayor of Sarandë offered the following insightful explanation as to the motivations behind the transformation of this MSB:

The initial idea of the bunker, when it was constructed, was to protect Sarandë and to supervise its harbour against an imaginary enemy. We believed that we could make it a feature for all tourists; first, for Albanians to know their own history, then for foreigners to know our past history. Because we are officially opening the tourist season of 2017 today, we believe that this should be an object that should be valued and be recognized today. Floriana Koka, Mayor of Sarandë (Gazeta Shqip 2017, translated from Albanian by Mirgen Shametaj).

Within the context of my research into MSBs, this marks a shift in the perception and value of these structures which have rarely been conceived as having tourist potential outside of Tiranë. It is possible that the trigger for this MSB retention and conservation was the scale and aftermath of the 2011–2013 destruction work for scrap metal. However, it remains to be seen whether this will stay a single example or be replicated elsewhere. As a final point, this newly touristified MSB is lit up at night, subjecting it to a bright level of exposure that would have been unthinkable during communism.

Review Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objectives

• To make a significant contribution towards Cold War material culture studies by focusing on a single, but numerous, object within communist Albania.
• To demonstrate how an interdisciplinary Modern Conflict Archaeology approach can contribute to an examination of a ‘stand-off’ landscape without conflict.

• To explore how an object that signifies a political system, e.g. the Albanian MSB within the Cold War, can be renegotiated once that regime has passed and create new afterlives involving reconfigured cosmologies and additional narratives.

• To illustrate how the relatively small MSB artefact constitutes a larger landscape artefact and how that relationship has changed over time.

Research Questions

• How did the mushroom-shaped bunker programme impact upon the Albanian landscape and on people and culture?

• Can an archaeological examination of MSB materiality and the anthropological use of living-memory signify a route by which subject-object relations can create biographies of Cold War concrete relics?

• To what degree have post-communist re-engagements with MSBs re-defined their symbolic value and perception within contemporary Albania?

• How many MSBs were constructed during the communist period?

The research undertaken for this thesis has been collated since 2008, which was around the time when examinations of Albania’s MSB legacy was viewed by Albanians as a more acceptable research topic. Negative attitudes towards these structures began to wane from around 2005 as the country became more prosperous and people looked towards tourism as a way forward economically. The closed and secret nature of Albania’s Cold War period means it has been hard
to source official archives or trustworthy literature.

This was one of the main reasons for my undertaking this thesis where I found that combining subject and object relations with my field experience as an archaeologist would be the main route to comprehend MSBs before the remaining resource and people have gone. The first-hand MSB stories of individual and collective experiences during communism remain present within the Albanian community, but the physical MSB resource has significantly reduced. Considering how Albania’s MSBs were thought to be a near permanent militarised landscape, it did not actually take very long to remove much of it for economical purposes.

Through an examination and analysis of MSBs, this study has generated alternative narratives towards Albania’s Cold War experience. It has also explored how the ensuing legacy of this period impacted on identity and the ways in which Albania has looked forward towards the West since 1991. The MSB programme (1967–1989) covered the second half of Albania’s Cold War period. It comprised a total overhaul of the landscape and created an environment that was more intensely militarised than at any other period of Albania’s history. After an initial period of relatively small-scale bunkerisation with Type 4 and Type 5 MSBs, this scheme was upscaled to incorporate the development of Type 1, 2 and 3 MSBs from 1973 which was facilitated by prefabrication of elements for different topographies.

Taking a modern conflict archaeological and anthropological approach to the creation and legacy of Albania’s MSB landscape enabled multiple facets of this Cold War period to be drawn out and their relevance examined in the present. Although the country was not invaded, the country, landscape and people were prepared for it in an industrialised manner by a leadership who overhauled the entire pre-Second World War system. New enterprises for manufacturing, agriculture and industry were created, all centrally controlled with much of the output directed towards landscape militarisation which had an obvious impact on the mentality of the population.

Many of these sites are now derelict or parts have been repurposed for industry or housing, illustrating that the social life of any communist architectural legacy in Albania is an ongoing process of re-commodification which sustains shifting links between people and place. The connection between people and MSBs has been demonstrated throughout both case studies to highlight the impact of subject and object on each other, and how people’s lives and their locales were shaped via a national consciousness of defending Albania. The results of my
archaeological and anthropological fieldwork have demonstrated how the individual and collective MSB physical and psychological legacy of these once omnipresent markers of Albania’s Cold War have maintained a form of relevance in modern Albania.

The recent past nature of Albania’s Cold War means that an abundance of first-hand memory exists for the period. Due to the lack of access to official archives of the period, particularly those which pertain to military or political histories, this thesis has found that oral histories of personal experience are currently the most insightful and effective route to generate technical data for MSBs and narratives of experiential information. This does not mean that everything said during an interview should be taken as fact. Conflicting information was given during interviews about the specifics of MSB production, materials, weights and the manufacturing or installation process. This may be due to local variations, misremembering, guesswork, or data I was unable to cross-reference with my own field observations. Any evidence I was not sure about was not included within this thesis.

Communist tropes that did not seem to be based on that person’s life experience were also not used within the case studies. For example, MSB strength testing with various animals inside — an experience many people claim to have witnessed first-hand, or even the insertion of the original architect, Josif Zagali, to prove faith towards his own design. When gathering Albanian oral histories, additional caution needs to be exercised, as second or third hand stories of communism can often be repeated as personal experience. This is likely a consequence of the collective nature of life under communism added to the Albanian people’s enjoyment of talking and their curiosity about people and the outside world. The fallibility of memory is another factor, but this and the above issues should not dissuade anybody from collecting historical memories of communism before it is too late, and as I have demonstrated there is a vast potential of enquiry that may soon be lost.

Teasing out aspects of MSBs and the programme which created these objects using a combination of historical memories and field exploration has provided much greater levels of detail and experiences not previously acknowledged. This is particularly noticeable when compared to other literature regarding MSBs which is generalised, summative and often repetitive. This does not only relate to the quantification of the MSB numbers, but also stereotypes which stem from these generalisations regarding the wider treatment of Albanians under Hoxha. The research undertaken for this thesis has found that what was dictated for
Albanians under Hoxha was not always experienced as a localised reality, and that it is the perception of strictness and conformity that mattered more than it being slavishly put into practice.

Some of the interviews undertaken for this thesis demonstrated that although much of the Albanian communist experience is considered by outside or Western researchers as negative, this opinion is not always reflected by the people who lived it (also see Iacono and Këlliçi 2015; Le Devehat 2020). The centralised control over daily life and constant ideological conformity is not an aspect people would like to revisit, but the camaraderie experienced with fellow workers, friends and family of the time is clearly lacking somewhat in the lives of some Albanians today. Positive aspects of communism tend to be ignored within research as they do not suit the ideology of the narrator, which can result in a degree of Western patronisation being applied. This can carry as much bias as communist produced publications which promoted the story of Albania’s workers’ paradise in the way it was imagined by those at the top.

The loss of a shared community combined with the (perceived) equality, jobs for all and having a direction and purpose in life is an aspect missed by some of the older generation, either for themselves or their children. This may be the result of inter-generational aspirational differences and again, neither generation would wish to return to that time or have their lives dominated in such a way, but it feels like something has been lost. This thesis found that such lived experiences are something that cannot be drawn out from the MSB object alone, rather they are observed best in conversation.

Much value lies within combining objects with people who experienced them to create MSB cosmologies. This illustrates a route by which personal comprehensions can be directed towards teasing out multiple conceptual landscapes of Albanian communism. In addition, the benefit of using the physical or emotional experience of MSBs to draw out oral histories in this way lies precisely in their ubiquitous nature, meaning most people have experienced and engaged with them in some way during their life. Ultimately, this means the potential for creating cultural biographies for MSBs is seemingly endless.

Oral historical interviews were focused on narratives surrounding MSB objects, their functional military history, and people’s experiences. Inevitably these discussions conjured up a wealth of additional memories and information which were invaluable for this research. Poole has noted that: ‘the act of memory takes place in the present, but also the event or person that
is being remembered is also brought into the present’ (2008: 160). This was seen by way of the events or stories recounted by the former workers with present issues debated during interviews and body language of former workers during the interview as specific events were recollected and issues debated. People’s stories should be listened to without any pre-assumptions to gain a truer insight into their lived experiences, which is an aspect that cannot be drawn from books about the period, or indeed from the MSB object on its own.

The only interviews that could be considered as being undertaken on-site were those at the Vrion and Gjirokastër concrete factories, the rest were held in cafes, houses or outdoors. It was not difficult to seek out former employees who are familiar with the workings of these industrial spaces of communism. The combination of structural remains with first-hand accounts based on lived experiences enabled a fuller comprehension of the functionality of such a factory complex. It can also be a means by which hitherto intangible aspects of the character and cosmologies of that industrial space can be revealed, permitting the wider landscape to be re-imagined accordingly. To that end being in the factory space with the interviewees in the stale heat and dusty quiet there was a lingering sense of a poignant echo, that was brought to life by the recounting of memories towards a lost past.

The results of mapping for this thesis across both study areas enabled estimates for total MSB numbers for Albania to be calculated. These figures represent MSBs as defined by my five-tier typology with a further estimate based on the inclusion of PZ bunkers mapped in the Drino Valley study area. No PZ bunkers were present on the Ksamil Peninsula, but the area size was included in the mathematical working out.

• 230,595 MSBs (+20% = 276,715)
• 232,203 MSBs and PZ bunkers (+20% = 278,644)

The methodology used (see Chapter 3) to plot positions in the landscape over a satellite map has also enabled the distribution and number of installations for each MSB type to be put into context and examined. Previous works have described Albania’s MSBs strategy as ‘based on paranoia and devoid of any military logic’ (Pandolfi 2002; 205). In our multiple discussions regarding MSB strategy, Oliver Gilkes has offered the opinion that the placement of MSBs across the Albanian landscape does not make military sense as the remoteness of some positions
renders them pointless. He has argued that the random emplacement of MSBs demonstrates how positioning these defences was not taken seriously within the context of a cohesive military strategy. Gilkes is of the opinion that local people networks requested more MSB installations than was strategically necessary to carry favour with Tiranë and be viewed as loyal New-Albanians (see Gilkes 2013: 314–315).

This is certainly a possibility, but without access to archives or communications detailing such requests it is difficult to prove that installing MSBs did not just end up a constant occupation, perpetually in-process because nobody dared to speak against it (see Chapter 3). The mapping for this thesis certainly highlights a degree of strategy, with only forward-facing positions in the landscape being populated with MSBs, albeit in a heavy manner. Different MSB types had been developed for accessible and less-accessible parts of the landscape, which is shown in the Drino Valley in the difference between installations on hills or mountains versus the flat plain, with the foothills being the grey area in between and dependent on road access.

This can be demonstrated in comparing the numbers of Type 1 and 2 MSBs found within both study areas. The number of Type 2 MSBs installed across the Drino Valley (1356) is proportionally lower, based on the size of the area, than what was installed on the smaller Ksamil Peninsula (958). Unsurprisingly, this is the opposite for Type 1 MSBs, which are significantly higher on the Drino Valley (5336) compared to the Ksamil Peninsula (177). The reasons for this are strategic, but also practical. The Drino Valley has larger areas of flat land than the Ksamil Peninsula, which was the intended topography for Type 1 MSBs, and the Gjirokastër concrete factory production site was located centrally for distribution. The Ksamil Peninsula is a series of hills which had poor roads and was located at a 15–20km distance from the Vrion concrete factory, meaning Type 2 MSBs were easier to transport and install in the terrain. These considerations illustrate a degree of strategy within planning, but the resulting number of MSBs in the landscape remains much higher than what would have been required for defence.

Taking previous estimates of MSB numbers in Albania into account, the field surveys and mapping conducted for this thesis has shown that it is unlikely that 750,000 MSBs were produced and installed in Albania. Even if the estimated number of PZ bunkers is included, the final number is far lower than Stefa and Mydyti’s estimate but a little higher than the figure of 173,371 presented at Bunk’Art 1. The idea of there being 750,000 MSBs derives from communist
propaganda and highlights the problem of not being able to access whatever official documentation may exist in archives. Overall, the results of MSB mapping along with information gathered within interviews indicates that Albania’s installation of MSBs was a bureaucratically planned and coordinated effort, rather than simply being a crazy impulsive practice as implied by some media articles and internet travel blogs (e.g. Gill 2006). I plan to continue mapping MSBs in this way (see below) and will be sharing this data with the Albanian institute of Archaeology when I hope to discuss an avenue for dissemination by hosting these plots online in the future.

Research Critique

The main critique within this research is that I am not Albanian. Although this aspect may have assisted with objectivity when looking at material remains of communism within Albania’s various landscapes, it means my emotive comprehension of that period is lacking (see comments by SV in Chapter 4). I can hear stories, but they do not cause me to feel them, no sensorial memories are triggered, and the wider nuances or ‘feelings’ of that period are beyond my comprehension. In addition, my basic Albanian language skills can help me travelling around the country but were not enough to translate my own interviews with non-English speakers. There is always the potential that, even using a trusted translator, meanings were lost or information mis-understood.

Consequently, I utilised a great deal of ethnographical observation and empirical research, meaning this thesis contains reflexive elements of interpretation, which I hope are transparent. I was not there during the Cold War in Albania, and I am not of Albanian descent with family communist histories or narratives as part of my lived experience. Instead, for comprehension I have used the physical material and discussions alongside my understanding, archaeological skills, and observational ability in an attempt at objectivity. Unfortunately, a level of bias is inevitable, whereby: ‘as researchers, the impressions of a site will affect our results and our conclusions’ (McWilliams 2013: 21). Any comprehension errors, therefore, are my own.

This thesis also presents a heavier comprehension of the landscape and people on the Ksamil Peninsula compared to the larger Drino Valley area where my fieldwork was targeted on
specific areas in-depth whereas the rest of the region was subject to a broader overview. For sample comparison purposes it may have been more prudent to have focused on MSBs along the Gjirokastër land border region, taking in a similar sized area as what constitutes the Ksamil Peninsula. However, I recognise that if this had been the case, I would not have encountered any Type 5 MSBs or taken in many of the incredible areas of research potential offered by the wider Drino Valley.

The physical and conceptual social life of MSBs has changed has more in the past ten years than it had across the preceding twenty years after 1991. My yearly visits to Albania from 2001 on excavations at Butrint with the Butrint Foundation concluded in 2012. These had facilitated my being in the country for long periods of time, meaning that subsequently I missed being able to personally capture aspects of MSB engagements. This was most marked across the 2013–2017 gap between trips as a lack of personal finances meant yearly visits was not feasible. I have relied on my Albanian contacts for updates and images regarding MSB related information, news articles, novel re-uses, and tourism aspects.

This was particularly notable during the 2011–2013 breaking period which was an incredibly dynamic period of re-engagement for MSBs, and I was lucky that friends sent photos of the process or aftermath of destruction. These offerings were welcome at a time when I was not able to witness such events myself or record and engage with them in an archaeological manner for this thesis. My sporadic Albania visits also mean I have been unable to ground-truth as many MSB locations as I would have liked or interview more people. The lack of access of official archives has already been covered but is an aspect I hope to revisit in the future. Finally, there are places I hope to revisit and new areas I would like to examine to see exactly how close my plotting reflects reality.

Future Work

It is intended that the mapping of MSBs in Albania will continue as an ongoing endeavour using the methodology detailed in Chapter 2 to digitally chart these structures from aerial imagery. This would adhere to the typology of five MSB forms outlined in Chapter 3, with provision to expand where other types are identified. Initially, this would use the two study areas in this
thesis as a starting point from which to cover the rest of Albania’s southern land and sea border regions. This would enable wider MSB landscapes to be examined by their installation density and distribution of positions by type. This additional information would allow the results of this thesis to be further tested and validated within a wider context. There is also the potential to map other militarised landscape legacies of communism which may be obscured on the ground but are clearly visible from the air.

Although the forensic nature of this mapping approach is rather time consuming, it has been demonstrated by this thesis it is a successful route towards comprehending the extent of Albania’s communist MSB landscapes. At present, this is the only way that this can be achieved without access to documents or maps held by relevant military defence archives. The Albanian ASIG portal for geospatial mapping is updated frequently with new data, for which it is hoped that a future LiDAR (Light Detecting And Ranging) layer will be added. This 3D technology would bring greater detail to ephemeral surface features, such as MSB communication trenches, and those areas currently covered by dense scrub or woodland would be made visible. This methodology could also be applied to other former Eastern European Cold War landscapes where high-resolution orthoimages are publicly available for use. These are particularly useful if data for different years is available to enable landscape changes to be tracked.

The recent MSB breaking for scrap metal and other landscape developments which have dislodged and destroyed these structures has greatly reduced their overall number. MSBs still exist in Albania, and visitors can still experience them but, as any official cultural heritage designation is unlikely to be forthcoming, then an inventory of the remaining resource is badly needed. This is also the case for Lapidars, Albanian memorial monuments, which also embody communist ideologies and are unofficially considered at risk in the landscape.

The Lapidar Survey of Albania highlighted the need for assessment of wider socialist heritage through national and legal frameworks (Gerven Oei 2015). Within this Lapidar context, Bickert called for an intensive discussion about the future role that these monuments could play in a modern Albania and highlighted how such considerations have been called for across the wider former Eastern European landscape by ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) (Bickert 2015: 106). Whether any greater recognition of socialist heritage through international frameworks could facilitate a change of opinion within Albania remains to be seen.

If the opportunity arose, I would propose a regional to national assessment of the
remaining MSB resource across Albania. This would enable a fuller comprehension of not only the scale of installation and differential distributions, but also see how much the 2011–2013 breaking impacted on numbers. From this, an MSB legacy inventory could be created with risk and historical value assigned to what remains for future preservation and protection. This could function as an educational participatory project for schools and the wider public to record locations, take photos, add stories, and give their own perspectives on future treatment to create some form of vision going forward. Such a project could follow similar methodologies and experiences to those generated by the UK based Defence of Britain and Home Front Legacies recording projects for Second and First World War military remains (Lowry 2002; Cocroft and Stamper 2018).

**Final Conclusions**

MSBs are a product of war, created as an internal and external response by a communist leadership, but are now abandoned and at risk within a political environment which selectively values differing elements of the past. Therefore, remaining MSBs in Albania’s landscape can be classed as unofficial, and mostly neglected, heritage sites. With no designated protection, these are at risk of deliberate destruction or breaking through erosion by natural forces, dependent on their location.

Once, MSBs exemplified Hoxha’s distrust of the foreign world. They were directed outwards, but also conveyed a message inward towards Albanians whose daily lives were already signified by restriction, particularly of mobility and choice. The scale of MSB production, installation, maintenance, military training use, and their visual presence in the landscape was a reminder to every citizen of exactly who was protecting them and their country: ‘Father Enver’. To this end, MSBs comprise a pure form of Hoxha’s ideological message; they encapsulate the terror, emotion, and strength of the communist propaganda that Albania was to be invaded which, in ignorance of the outside world, was believed by everyone.

That the MSB resource was of prime importance to Hoxha and his leadership is demonstrated by the amount of effort, participation and finance involved — not all of which was provided by Albania. It was through time-specific local to global socio-political networks
that Albania was able to create this distinctive Cold War material culture. MSBs were created because of twentieth century technological advancements which enabled faster communications, transport and supplies that connected Albania with the USSR and China.

It was these same globalised factors that also contributed towards Albania’s post-1978 isolation, when MSBs were to become Albania’s main ally against the rest of the world and consume vast amounts of national wealth to the detriment of the population and their daily life. The only consolation is that MSBs may have contributed towards the protection of an Albania which resisted the hegemony of neighbouring states, maintained its independence and is currently able to seek Western integration as a stand-alone country through membership of the European Union.

This thesis has highlighted the intangible symbolic values attached to the physical tangibility of MSBs, explored using a biographical approach to consider overlapping individual and collective stories across different temporal frameworks. It is the relationships and overlaps between these differing biographical narratives which were drawn out using two case study areas in southern Albania. These illustrated the depth and potential that lies, and continues to reside, within MSBs and their interrelationship with people on local, national, and global levels.

The Ksamil Peninsula once contained the ‘poster-level’ MSBs for the rest of Albania, and these brightly painted Cold War caps were featured within innumerable travel guides and articles on visiting Albania. The removal and recycling of MSBs to facilitate beach development and hotel constructions has hybridised these structures. They now bridge the gap from xenophobia within a formerly restricted region towards efforts which actively encourages domestic mobility and international tourists. The current national and global focus of these MSB materials is an unseen aspect of this idyllic Mediterranean beach landscape which, since communism fell, has pushed forward to encapsulate the concept of Albamodernity. In this important respect, the modern materiality of the MSB personifies the opposite of Hoxha’s intended message.

Within the Drino Valley the dense MSB landscape that once dominated views across this land border zone have now been mostly destroyed. Constituent materials and MSB parts have been re-distributed for functional uses within the local agriculturally directed economy. Here, the focus of landscape remodelling afforded by materials derived from MSB installations is domestic with elements of capitalist aspiration whereby private housing space is expanded by
using hillside revetments to increase the land footprint.

Tourism initiatives in the Drino Valley have recreated the MSB form in miniature and is juxtaposed alongside older, more traditional aspects of Albanian folk culture for sale to tourists. Embedding the MSB form into such an artisan framework gives it a historical legitimacy which denotes acceptance within the local community. For international visitors to the Drino Valley, it may not be too long before their only remaining avenue to engage with an MSB would be through the purchase of such a novelty souvenir — the miniature replacing the actual. These more recent engagements with MSBs have ascribed new layers of meaning and generated socio-economic and political questions about the place and value of communist heritage within contemporary Albanian society.

This thesis has moved Albanian MSBs away from simply being a large number and provided new perspectives on these seemingly uniform objects as individual installations, stop-lines, and multiple groups. It has proven that the bunkerisation of Albania was a layered process driven by technological development, financial aid and materials from China as well as the pathological national agenda of self-defence. This research has also demonstrated that MSBs do not only take a single form, but have practical variations based on their topographical setting, date of installation and distance from factory production sites.

The five-tier typology developed through my survey and fieldwalking created a new characterisation approach that can be utilised within future examinations of MSB landscapes and has facilitated an installation chronology which previously did not exist. This also fed into my developing a methodology for large scale landscape mapping using modern techniques of GPS survey, orthoimages and online aerial imagery. Although each individual mapped installation was not ground-truthed, it enabled a greater area to be covered to comprehend the scale and density of MSBs and examine defensive strategies.

This digital mapping approach is well-suited and necessary for countries like Albania where official documentation for the era under study is unavailable and where historical imagery can circumvent any loss through destruction. Such a methodology is easily transferrable and can be applied to other Cold War or bunkerised landscapes and can act as an ongoing aspect of future research, meaning mapping could occur prior to an actual field visit, then updated after. Such is the availability of global online aerial and historic imagery, that it would even be
possible to make a landscape assessment for difficult to access or dangerous areas such as conflict zones or countries like North Korea where no research visit may be permitted.

In addition to being a contribution towards the discipline of modern conflict archaeology and anthropology, this thesis will add to Cold War studies and research on communist Albania as a demonstration of how wartime landscape modifications impact the present. It has demonstrated how the MSB in Albania really is a Child of Two Worlds, reflecting the collective and individual experiences of Albanians under and beyond communism. The domed MSB cap shape has become a twenty-first century icon within modern Albania, perceived by foreigners as symbolising the country but this is not echoed in the Albanian mindset. Promotion of MSBs through touristification is accepted by Albanians for economic purposes, but they do not lie within local dialogues regarding modern day identities.

Finally, it is hoped that the results of this thesis will play a role within the planning of communist heritage and tourism considerations in Albania. Further negotiations of tangible and intangible materialities of this complex heritage may yet provide a navigable route to manoeuvre MSBs from merely being a hangover of Albania’s past towards their being a constructive inheritance for the future. At present, only one aspect remains certain: as additional engagements create further narratives and existing stories are re-worked, the complex biographies of mushroom-shaped bunkers are by no means complete.
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Appendix A

Shtëpia e Themistikëi Gërmënjit dhe bunkerët e komunizmit në Venecia

Bienalja e arkitekturës është célur i dje Edizioni i 13-të i Bienales së Venecias në Arkitekturë. Shqipëria përfaqësohet me një pavion të veçantë ku prezantohen katër projekte arkitektore.
Appendix B

Bunkerët ku shqiptarët janë zhvirljëruar për herë të parë...

Bunkerët shqiptarë, provë e jashtëzakonshme e Luftës së Ftohtë, janë objekt i cmuar studimesh për anglezët, të cilët e dinë se fjala bunker përdoret në sportin e golfit! Bunker konsiderohet sot edhe Kali mitologjik i Trojës, që grekët ndërtuan në mënyrë dinake... Anglezja Emily Glass vendos të merret me historitë njerëzore të bunkerëve shqiptarë, ku shumë të rinj janë ç’virgjëruar, ndërsa prindërit e tyre prisnin atje të fshehur për orë të têra që “clirimtarët” e komunizmit të vinin, më në fund...
Kur akrepat po shinonin mesnatën e 21 dhjetorit të vitit 1990, anglezat kishin disa muaq apo disa vjet që e kishte formosuar në vetevet nacionin e "arkologjisë kontemporane". Sipas këtij nacioni, gjithëka që i përkishte kultures materiale të shekullit të 20, nuk kishte paç të mos ishte edhe pjesë e studimit të tyre le të studiojnë kulturën materiale të shekullit të 20, nënkuptonte ky nacion!

A mund të ketë në Shqipëri monument më të jashtëzakonshëm dhe më pergjasues të shekullit të XX, se sa një bunker i ndërtuar në epokën e Enver Hoxhës...

Me këtë filozofi, një anglez në cilë e kishte përvesuar më së mirë koncepë të arkeologjisë kontemporane, Emily Glass, vendosi të zhvillojë masterin e saj me një tezi të fokusuar tërësisht të bunkërëve shqiptarë, të cilat apo i konsideron si një shenjtë të jashtëzakonshme historike por edhe arkeologjike të Luftës së Ptohtë.

Nisi, kishtu, të studionë jo vetem fikisht bunkërët, pozicionimin e tyre, mënyrën e ndërtimit, numrin dhe shpërtharjen e një vjeçar të historisë të tjera në të ildhur me, apo pa dëshmiri me një bunker të zakoqshëm, si ato mjëra që na shohin sytë në territorton shqiptar!

Glass konstatoi se këta bunkerë jo veten që ishin pjesë e rendisës së sistemit të fortifikimit komunist, por ishin edhe strehë e historive të jashtëzakonshme njëveçore, të gjente dhe vajzave që në to, për vite e vite të tërë kishtin gjetur një ambient intim, apo për bujfit që në to kishin gjetur magazinëm në të përshtatshme për të sigurtar të korrat apo mjetet e tyre të punës, apo të atyre idealishtë e ndërtimit të një shenjtë të shekullit të shqiptarë të kishin shpërtruar që adoqit dëte mund të shikonin pikërisht për drizare e luftarë "luftarë" të strukturave prej betonit të tyre, "shpëtimitarë" e komunistit që mund të vinë përmes detit, nga perëndimi...

Nëse kërkon sot për etnomologjinë e fjalës Bunker, do të hështë jo vetëm në shembujt shqiptarë, por edhe në shembujt amerikan, të cilat "bunkerët" e përdisin për të ndërtuar ca pengesa në fushat e golfit, që topi i vogël. I bardhë të mos përshndojë në gropa e fushës se gjelbër. Mund të bashi patjetër në bunkerin famjë të Hitlerit u martua, bërë manovrat e fundit puthuisse e ku vra veten!

Apo në bunkerë të tjera simbolike antikë, si për shembull Kalit i famshëm i Trojes, i cili pavarësisht nëse përmbet nga Xhoisë në historitën e Homerit, apo jo, në fund të fundit, kishte deri në fund funksionin ushtarak, mbretëres dhe "manipulues" të një bunkerë që sot mund të shikojmë me sy të lirë, ne cdo bregdet, ne cdo fushe, koder apo mal shqiptar...
shkatërroni
nët u penduan!

Mirëpo ato janë zakonisht objekti i parë që vihen ne nga sytë e dho turistë. Edhe në Angli ne kemi bunkërë disa nga Lufta e Parë Botërore, të tjerat nga Lufta e Dtë, por shumë prej tyre tashmë janë shkatërrovar dhe nuk kemi kaq shumë sa në vendin tuaj. Anëja shitër pse unë po i studioi ka të bëjt edhe me tezën të Masterit, e fokusuar mbi "Arkeologjinë Historike dhe Botë Moderne". Në këtë tez janë shumë të rëndësishëm elementë të historisë së afërt, si për shembull bunkërët, të cilët unë i trajtoj si pjesë e pesëzhit dhe gjeografisë, si pjesë të konfliktit, si elementë ujtarakë por edhe si pjesë të nëjë identiteti. Duke u fokusuar kështu në atë nocion të tre të arkeologisë së sotme që quhet "Arkeologjia Kontemporane". Ndionëse në Shqipëri ka një shumëllojshëm bunkërësh, si ato të vëglit në formën e kërputhave, ato më të mendhenj që kanë shërbyer për strehimin e tankeve apo ato të tjera të ndërtuara në formën e tunelëve, unë dë të fokusohem vetëm tek bunkërët e llojit të parë, pra ata të vëglit në formën e kërputhave, pasi mundoj se ka më shumë histori persionale njësزوre të lidhura me to, e me ushtarët që i kanë ndërtuar dhe përdorur, se me bunkërët e tjerë. Mendoj se këto bunkërë kanë një lidhje në të fortë mes së kahaarës dhe aktualitetit shqiptar.

MAPO: Si mund të jetë një bunker objekt i studimit të arkeologjisë?

Emily Glass: Arkeologjia studion të kahaarës dhe njërisht që e kanë jetuar atë. Ata të cilët kanë jetuar e kanë punuar në një periudhë të kulturë historike – ndaj në këtë kontekst edhe bunkërët me gëjtë historinë të tyre janë pjesë e këtij studimi. Kashdo mund të kuptojë që shumë nga Shqipëria dhe për shqiptarët që nga vitet 70-të edhe pa u konsoltojë me dokumenta historike apo duke folur me njëriçë, por t'ju kuptojë duke parë e studuar bunkërët! Ne mund t'i studiojme bunkërë si pjesë e një kulture materiale shqiptare, e duke i trajtoj në të gjithë ato për nga mënyna se si janë shpërndarët anësënd vendit, apo duke parë grafitet e vizatuar së fundmi në to, apo duke lexuar mbishkrimet e datave apo njërishe mbi to. Dhe e gëjtë kjo praktikë është shumë e ngjarime me mënynën se si në studiojme shumë së të tjerë mesjetare apo edhe romake. Për të patur konkluzion të qartë në duhët që të studiojmë strukturat e këtyre bunkërëve dhe të i krahasojmë një pastaj me mëbetë të tjerë materiale të të njëjtës periudhë. Me
Më vjen shumë keq që disa bunkerë të piktuar me graffi

TI NGA TURISTË CEKË, SOT JANË SHKATËRRUAR

Të formohesh në Shqipëri...

Emily Glass u diplomua në vitin 1998 në "University of Bradford BSc" në degën e Arkeologjisë. Nga vit 1998 - 2007 punoi si arkeolog për Oxford Archaeology me pas si kordinatore projekt në sëtet anglezë. Gjatë kësaj periudhe ka punuar me një skuadrë shpëtitmi


bunkerët ka edhe një pas tjeter që ne mund të lënem me njërisht dhe mund të kemi edhe një perspektive antropologjike të lidhura me përmendje jetësore të vështirë. Në këtë moment apo në këtë tjeter të siguri kanë histori të lidhë me bunkerët. Mund të krahasojmë pastaj rezultate edhe me artizaj apo informacione të tjera të shkruar dhe kësaj mund të kemi një rezultat të mirëfiltë. Shërby të gjetë, një pjesë e asaj që ju përmbena më lart, arkeologësh kontemporane e cila ta apo të vjetër e fundit është bërë e rëndësishtë në Angli.

MAPO: Në tregoni ndonjë moment interesant gjatë punës suaj studimore me bunkerët...

Emily Glass: Gjatë gjithë kohës së studimit, ka kuptuar se edhe bunker mund të të tregoi historinë e një njeriu dhe se edhe njeriu mund të këtë një histori të vetë për bunkerinat. Nëse besuojmë me shumë njerëz në lidhje me bunkerët, që nga ushtarësë deri te femije të cilët nuk mëna rrënu apo në tjeterin kanë mundur të krijojnë lojërë të ndryshme në bunker, apo dhe me njerëz të tjera që kanë naundur të këtë njenjë përjetim nga bunkerët duke i përdoruar ato shpejtë si magazine për objekte të ndryshme materiale. Nëse komunikon edhe me njerëz që bunkerinë e kanë pori se një formë të rekthetisë izolimi dhe intimitetit. Interesante në të gjithë këtë kontekst është ndryshimi i përdorimit dhe i perceptimit të bunkerëve nga një ndryshe korohë në njëtjen. Gjatë ky ndryshim, në vetëve të tregon ndryshimet strukturore, shpërthimi, ekonomike, soziale dhe politike të vendit tuaj.

Një histori gazmore teksa po piktoronisë disa bunkerë në Kamerun, nje ofohet nje person dhe na gjet se pse po e bëhim atë gjak. Pastaj në tregon se disa herë ai ishte strehuar në ato bunkerë duke pritur me pamoje nga Kfortuzi që "groket të vithur". Një kanë tëdhur të vështirë dhe njerëzisht të përdorur për një ndryshë të thjeshtë. Në tregon se në një ripre mbështet bunkërave ishte pritur me orë e orë të tërë që nga Kfortuzi të vënë groket, të cilat nuk e rihen asnjëherë. Epo, kjo është jeta (qesi).

Kam konstatuar gjithashtu se shumë bunkerë janë shkatërruar. Sigurohet ku njeriu e mëna të òlë të Shqipërisë dhe unë një kërkoni për shumë këtë përplasjen për të gjetur këtë në Shqipëri, sot janë shkatërruar për shkak të ndërtimeve të roja...

Dhe të është që sështritë në bunkër të piktuar me grafitti nga turi dhe e pjesë e këtij turistik të jashtëzakonomisht të tyre në Shqipëri, sot janë shkatërruar për shkak të ndërtimeve të roja...

Bunkerët e sëdies

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**Bunkerët e komunizmit**

Emily Glass: Shfrytëzojini për turizëm

*Arkologjia angleze, Emily Glass, boton një studim mbi bunkerët e Shqipërisë. Ajo hedh idënen që ata mund të shfrytëzojen për motive nga më të ndryshmë, mbi të githa për turizëm. "Pavarësitëse se bunkerët u kanë sëllëje në majë të hadhës, mos i shkatërroni se gjeranët që në shkatërruan, janë pendaar", thotë ajo*

---

**Edicion i 12**

**Bunkeri në festival**

Emtoni në festival të shkทนën bashkësesë punonjësit e Arkeologjisë, Emily Glass, boton një studim mbi bunkerët e Shqipërisë. Ajo hedh idënen që ata mund të shfrytëzojen për motive nga më të ndryshmë, mbi të githa për turizëm. "Pavarësitëse se bunkerët u kanë sëllëje në majë të hadhës, mos i shkatërroni se gjeranët që në shkatërruan, janë pendaar", thotë ajo.

---

**Sërbe tra muaj por flamuri në festival**

"Skampa", trupa sërbe pa flamuri në festival

Edisoni i 12 festival të shpikujve bashkësesë punonjësit e Arkeologjisë, Emily Glass, boton një studim mbi bunkerët e Shqipërisë. Ajo hedh idënen që ata mund të shfrytëzojen për motive nga më të ndryshmë, mbi të githa për turizëm. "Pavarësitëse se bunkerët u kanë sëllëje në majë të hadhës, mos i shkatërroni se gjeranët që në shkatërruan, janë pendaar", thotë ajo.
Apolonia hap bunkerët për turistët

Jani të tëmërtërëzohet e interesuar për të parë nga afër këto objektet

Rudina Ciko, recital për Shopenin dhe Shumanin

Njih koncert recital për Shopenin (Shakespeare dhe Shumanin) që tregon atoke të ndryshme ndaj këptarit të koncertuarit të kanë qenë në burg të Koncertuarit. Koncertin recital të është treguar në Touch Theatre e Qrenit dhe të ndihmon të lidhni më shumë me të madhësimin e koncertuarit në mënyrë të ndryshme. "Këto koncertin e ngjashmojnë këtë koncertin e të parëve, e saj të koncertuarit," thotë Rudina Ciko. "Dëshmita e quajt më shumë për të ndihmuar me të përcaktojë që të gjithë të jenë të shpërndarë dhe të rregullohen në punt të koncertuarit."

Aktiviteti

Pedagogët e Akademinës e Arteve në Poloni

Djegjyja e që ka zgjedhur pedagogët në Akademinë e Arteve në Poloni, istëjëse që janë të ndryshme në të ndryshme lufta dhe të ndryshme person."Më pas toja unë pa nrancën, këto koncertin e quajt më shumë për të shumë shumë dhe të përcaktuar në këtë koncertin e të parëve," thotë Rudina Ciko. "Dëshmita e quajt më shumë për të ndihmuar me të përcaktojë që të gjithë të jenë të shpërndarë dhe të rregullohen në punt të koncertuarit."

Etj.
Appendix D

Miss Emily Glass
Professor Nicholas Saunders
Department of Anthropology and Archaeology
43v Woodland Road
Clifton
Bristol
BS8 1UU

07th May 2020

Dear Miss Glass

Ref: 36701
Title: Concrete Biographies: Perception and Identity of Albanian Communist Mushroom-Shaped Bunkers

I write in relation to the above-named research ethics application that was submitted for review by the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee (FREC). I can confirm that the above-named ethics application was reviewed by the Chair of the FREC, Professor Mark Horton, who has agreed to grant a favourable ethical opinion for the above-named study on March 12, 2017.

The committee recognises that you have been diligent in anticipating and responding to ethical issues in your preparation for the research. Please note that the FREC expects to be notified of any changes or deviations in the study.

Good luck with your study.

Yours sincerely

Liam McKervey
Research Governance and Ethics Officer

Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee (FREC)
University of Bristol Faculty of Arts
3-5 Woodland Road
Bristol
BS8 1TB
Tel: 0117 954 5882
Appendix E

Miss Emily Glass  
University of Bristol  
Department of Anthropology and Archaeology  
43 Woodland Road  
Clifton  
Bristol  
BS8 1TB

18th October 2018

Dear Miss Glass

Ref: 36701  
Title: Concrete Biographies: Perception and Identity of Albanian Communist Mushroom-Shaped Bunkers (Amendment 1)

Thank you for submitting amendment request in relation to the above-named study for review by the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee (FREC). The FREC have reviewed your amendment request and noted your request to seek approval to use data collected during your MA dissertation which was collected prior to the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Committee (FREC) being operational. The committee also reviewed your request to use the data collected at the beginning of your PhD. The committee noted your positive engagement with the ethics committee since, including obtaining a favorable opinion for the above-named study for prospective data collection.

The committee also received your amendment request to collect data at an upcoming conference.

As stated in our previous correspondence retrospective ethical approval cannot be granted for data previously collected. However, the committee have agreed to issue a recommendation that the data collected during your MA dissertation and at the beginning of their PhD can be used for your PhD submission.

The committee has also agreed to issue a favourable opinion for you to collect data at the conference in October.

Good luck with your research and your PhD submission.

Yours sincerely
Liam McKervey  
Research Governance and Ethics Officer

Professor Simon Potter,  
Faculty Research Ethics Officer,
## Appendix F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anonymous Interviewee Number</th>
<th>Male / Female</th>
<th>Age at Interview &amp; Birth Year</th>
<th>Occupation at Interview</th>
<th>Communist Occupation</th>
<th>Language Used</th>
<th>Date and Location</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IN-1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57 / 1951</td>
<td>Archaeology professor</td>
<td>Teacher and archaeologist</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>23.06.08 Ksamil</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN-2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46 / 1962</td>
<td>General workman</td>
<td>MSB installer during National Service and Gjirokastër concrete factory worker</td>
<td>Albanian and English</td>
<td>25.06.08 Gjirokastër</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN-3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34 / 1974</td>
<td>Executive Manager at Gjirokastër Conservation and Development Organisation (GCDO)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Albanian and English</td>
<td>25.06.08 Gjirokastër</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN-4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25 / 1982</td>
<td>Conservation student</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>23.06.08 Sarandë</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN-5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35 / 1972</td>
<td>Barman</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>26.06.08 Ksamil</td>
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<td>IN-6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50 / 1960</td>
<td>Taxi driver</td>
<td>General worker at concrete factory</td>
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<td>10.07.10 Gjirokastër</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN-7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>58 / 1952</td>
<td>General workman</td>
<td>Factory technical specialist for metals and concrete</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>10.07.10 Gjirokastër</td>
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<td>IN-8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54 / 1956</td>
<td>General workman</td>
<td>Concrete factory worker and metalworker</td>
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<td>IN-9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30 / 1982</td>
<td>Project manager, Butrint Foundation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>18.07.12 Ksamil</td>
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<td>IN-10</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44 / 1973</td>
<td>Taxi Driver</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>11.04.17 Çajupi Plain</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN-11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61 / 1956</td>
<td>Building construction</td>
<td>Designer and Chief of Sector for the Civil Defence of the Republic of Albania</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>07.04.17 Tiranë</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN-12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68 / 1950</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Military Commandant of Ksamil Company</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>13.10.18 Sarandë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN-13</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27 / 1981</td>
<td>Restaurant and beach owner</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>24.06.08 Ksamil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Named Interviewees</td>
<td>Male / Female</td>
<td>Age at Interview &amp; Birth Year</td>
<td>Occupation at Interview</td>
<td>Communist Occupation</td>
<td>Interview Language</td>
<td>Interview Date and Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>AD - Arvid Dervishi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>33 / 1983</td>
<td>Restaurant worker</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English and Albanian</td>
<td>14.04.17 Ksamil</td>
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<tr>
<td>AK - Andrea Kristo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60 / 1967</td>
<td>Restaurant owner</td>
<td>Military Transport Chief</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>11.04.17 Çajupi Plain</td>
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<tr>
<td>AT - Auron Tare</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48 / 1968</td>
<td>Director of Albanian National Coastal Agency</td>
<td>Military Academy student</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>19.04.17 Tiranë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG - Bledar Goxharaj</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40 / 1976</td>
<td>Commercial Banker</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>15.04.2017 Sarandë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EÇ - Elton Çaushi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 / 1976</td>
<td>Part owner and tourist guide with tour operator company ‘Albania Trip’</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>06.04.17 Tiranë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL - Edvin Lamçë</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25 / 1982</td>
<td>Albanian heritage and tour guide</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>09.04.17 Gjirokastër</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IP - Ilir Parangoni</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34 / 1982</td>
<td>Tour guide and Project Manager at Albanian-American Development Foundation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>10.04.17 Gjirokastër</td>
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<tr>
<td>KF - Kristina Fidhi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39 / 1978</td>
<td>Tour Guide and Journalist</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>10.04.17 Gjirokastër</td>
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<tr>
<td>LB - Lubiana Baoja</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39 / 1978</td>
<td>Artisan craft programme coordinator</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>10.04.17 Gjirokastër</td>
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<tr>
<td>MÇ - Meritan Çeliku</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44 / 1972</td>
<td>Hotel and bar owner</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>11.04.17 Ksamil</td>
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<tr>
<td>MM - Muhedin Makri</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>77 / 1939 (died 14/03/20)</td>
<td>Stonemason and craftsman</td>
<td>Metalworker</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>09.04.17 Gjirokastër</td>
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<tr>
<td>MS - Mirgen Shametaj</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28 / 1988</td>
<td>Professional archaeologist</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>11.04.17 Ksamil</td>
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<tr>
<td>PA - Perparim Ahmeti</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55 / 1962</td>
<td>Hotel and restaurant owner</td>
<td>Military Service</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>13.04.17 Ksamil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location</td>
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<td>RG - Reshat Gega</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51 / 1956</td>
<td>Heritage conservation specialist</td>
<td>Albanian and English</td>
<td>11.04.17</td>
<td>Gjirokastër</td>
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<td>SM - Sotir Marjani</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55 / 1962</td>
<td>Owner of concrete factory and restaurant</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>15.04.17</td>
<td>Vrion</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP - Sadi Petrela</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>63 / 1954</td>
<td>Director at Gjirokastër Foundation</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>07.04.17</td>
<td>Tiranë</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV - Sabina Veseli</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42 / 1975</td>
<td>Professional archaeologist</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>20.04.17</td>
<td>Tiranë</td>
</tr>
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<td>TS - Tahir Sulejmani</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57 / 1960</td>
<td>Metalworker at Vrion concrete factory</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>15.04.17</td>
<td>Sarandë</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

RE: Ethical Approval for Emily Glass

Dear Sir or Madam,

Emily Glass, PhD student of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Bristol has informed us that she intends to undertake fieldwork in Albania for her thesis, ‘Concrete Biographies: Perception and Identity of Albanian Communist Mushroom-Shaped Bunkers’.

We understand that this fieldwork will be composed of ethnographic interviews, photographic survey, point mapping, archive research and museum visits and there will be no physical archaeological excavation. We are happy to support this research and are satisfied that she will work respectfully within our regulatory guidelines and laws of Albania for her project.

Yours sincerely,

Luan Përzhitja
Appendix H

34 Mivart St.
Bristol
BS5 6JF
England
UK

Dear Ms. Emily,

We received your letter asking us to give you the assistance to work with your PhD research. We fully appreciate your patience and the will to work with the Albanian MoD.

Although we do have the documents that you are looking forward for your research, according to the Albanian Legal Framework, unfortunately we are not able to grant you the permission to access the Albanian MoD archives.

We realize that the access would be very important and helpful for your research, but we hope that you will kindly understand.

Thank you for giving us an opportunity to explain our situation.

Respectfully,

Albanian General Staff