

Mud Sweeter than Honey: Voices of Communist Albania

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Personal testimonials reveal the lived truths of communist Albania in Margo Rejmer's oral history book *Mud Sweeter than Honey*.

Of the communist states in Europe after World War II, Albania is less discussed. It was cut off from the outside world for decades by its dictator Enver Hoxha, as life there devolved into states of poverty and repression. Economic, cultural, and educational devastation was the result. Albania today is an enigma, too, despite its thirty years of democracy. Rejmer lets its people speak about their experiences in their own words.

The book is written like a fairy tale. Its introduction sets up the testimonials, which reveal a repressive society based on contradictions bordering on the absurd. There is a disgraced government minister who is forced to live in a shack as a cow herder, but is allowed to keep his library of thousands of books. There is the son of Hoxha's right-hand man, who lived like a prince—though the kingdom he inhabited consisted of a few blocks of houses surrounding Hoxha's home. There is a man who yearns for the days when the state provided everything, including shoes whose soles fell off. There are people who were told they lived in a paradise of gender equality because the same number of men and women were allowed into a grocery store that had no food to sell.

These testimonials capture the experiences of their speakers at length. The context provided to explain the circumstances of the people speaking is bare boned; Rejmer only appears when it's necessary to add comments or to clarify. In the process: the voices and idiosyncrasies of these informants are maintained for posterity.

From the survivors of the regime, *Mud Sweeter than Honey* collects important testimonies about life in communist Albania.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (November / December 2021)

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