MEMORY MATTERS:

Post-socialist Wastelands as Materials Bearing Witness

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Abstract

This article engages with Albania's abandoned post-industrial wastelands to investigate the matters and materiality of collective memory inscribed in de-industrialized landscapes. The article starts by developing an analysis of depictions and perceptions of nature during the socialist regime that were also crucial in constructing the Albanian countryside as well as the many industrial towns in the periphery that were built from scratch to accommodate factory workers. The article then focuses on the ruination, emptiness, and decay of those former places that once were the epitome of collective work, production, and socialist modernity. In exploring the human and more-than-human matters that remain in those abandoned spaces as well as the ways in which contemporary artists have incorporated the

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materiality of post-industrial and post-socialist sites in their practice, the article argues that post-socialist wastelands have borne witness to the multiple abrupt socio-political changes that have occurred in Albania's recent history while transgressing linear understandings of time and space.

Keywords: *post-industrialism, post-socialist landscape, socialist countryside, environmental degradation, terraforming, collective memory, visual cultures*

I. Introduction

The post-socialist space is inevitably scarred, on the one hand by the material and visual remnants of its past, and on the other hand by the new struggles brought forward with the transition to neoliberal democracy. In the years following the collapse of the communist regime in Albania in 1990, the socialist past was approached predominately through vocabularies of trauma, shame, and political violence, manifested in public space through the so-called sites of "dark tourism".[2] Commemorative practices have made a difficult history more challenging to understand and, therefore, to come to terms with. More crucially though, approaching the past as the only repository of social and political injustice, since democracy and freedom were actualized in the capitalist reality, has brought about an inertia in terms of building a collective critique and taking political responsibility for the present. This is an

[2] See, for instance, sites such as Bunk'Art I and II, Shtëpia me Gjethe (House of Leaves), and the Site of Testimony and Memory in Shkodër whose aims are to expose the crimes and atrocities committed by the Albanian Party of Labor.

immediate symptom of transition, during which time the post-socialist space was seen as a blank slate upon which new imaginaries, collective desires, and aspirations could be projected. Existing achievements or moments of progress were forgotten. The post-communist era, announcing the failures of socialist modernity and sealing the communist past in some distant past, inaugurated a new chapter dictated by the frameworks of neoliberal democracy, which would liberate and 'heal' the suffering economies of the socialist East. However, despite the new promises brought forward by the transition to neoliberal democracy, the societies undergoing transformation in the 1990s and 2000s saw a rise in social inequality, local conflicts, political corruption, and crises of the democratic system itself, as well as the dismantling of the welfare state that imposed a new set of precarities.

In the case of Albania, the rush to catch up with the prosperous economies of the West finds its resonance particularly in the economic crash of 1997, which led to civil unrest and chaos. The unpreceded scale at which the pyramid schemes were accepted, and even eagerly promoted by the government, demonstrate on the one hand inexperience in operating in an open market economy, and, on the other hand, a thirst for private accumulation and property in the aftermath of communism's scarcity economy. Pyramid schemes mediated the process of privatizing state property and were further fueled by the flows of immigrant remittances.[3] Privatizations, the weakening of state institutions and the generalized state of

[3] Smoki Musaraj, *Tales from Albarado: Ponzi Logics of Accumulation in Postsocialist Albania*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020.

disorder were further intensified by the discourse of corruption, which in essence facilitated the implementation of neoliberal policies.[4] Like Walter Benjamin's allegory of the Angel of History in which the forceful path toward progress leaves behind catastrophes and debris,[5] similarly, the collapse of communism, which was nothing but a sudden rupture that disturbed the linearity and continuity of historical time, has left behind multiple sites and temporalities of ruination. This ruination finds resonance in the continuous migration flows, the emptying villages and towns, and the multiple examples of abandoned socialist infrastructure that persist despite recent rapid development projects.

In response to the reality described above, this article approaches the "unwanted" landscapes of Albania as material archives that witness the many transformations of the post-socialist time/space. Contrary to official sites of commemoration whose narrative has already been predefined, sites of industrial ruination and abandonment do not belong only in the past. The very fact that post-industrial *matters* still occupy actual space in the urban fabric and landscape renders them also a *matter* of the present. This becomes evident when we look at non-human temporalities whose histories escape human lived experience. For instance, in addition to the visible matter, the invisible toxic pollutants that remain in the soil, the water, and the air of former

[4] Blendi Kajsiu, *A Discourse Analysis of Corruption: Instituting Neoliberalism against Corruption in Albania, 1998–2005*, Surrey, England and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2014.

[5] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 2007.

industrial areas affect both present lives and those that are yet to come, demonstrating a need to think of the past beyond simple linear understandings of history that cover human lifespans.[6] How are we then to approach post-socialist wastelands? And more crucially, why does such an engagement with this infrastructure *matter* for the present?

Engaging with the many pasts engraved in the industrial spaces of ruination is not simply about a long-gone history. Instead, it is about making sense of the very essence that shapes both the current present, and the present that is yet to come. The matters of the past offer alternative ways of understanding the multiple and rapid transformations of the (post)socialist landscape by paying attention to the very human and more-than-human elements that constitute this landscape. Seeing matter, time and space as entangled entities, or to use Karen Barad's neologism "spacetimemattering", transgresses the boundaries between what was before and after, here and there. Barad has argued that memory, "the pattern of sedimented enfoldings of iterative intra-activity—is written into the fabric of the world. The world 'holds' the memory of all traces; or rather, the world is its memory".[7] This observation challenges predefined ideas

[6] For a critique of how cultural memory becomes a problematic model to engage with the past, since it translates personal or collective experiences as *actual* history, see Peter Osborne, "'The Truth will be known when the last witness is dead': History not Memory". Talk given at Birkbeck University, London, 17 May 2010: https://archive.org/details/bb-peter-osborne-the-truth-will-be-known-when-the-last-witness-is-dead-history-not [last accessed: 15 July 2024].

[7] Karen Barad, "Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: Dis/continuities, spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come", *Derrida Today* vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, pp. 240–268 (p. 261).

that view memory only as a human activity of narrating the past. Instead, it suggests that the world that surrounds us, being a living archive, points to a past that is constantly open and present, for those who care to listen. At the same time, the entangled and iterative relationships that we have both with each other but also with everything that was before or after, posits an ethical responsibility. It is a recognition and reconfiguration that transcends human experiences.

It is within these theoretical frameworks that this article approaches the post-socialist landscape of Albania as an archive that holds a depository of knowledge. The fact that this archive has materialized in actual spaces and sites, makes it also a matter that we need to deal with in the present. This article then aims to identify the ways in which contemporary art practices employ the material remnants of the socialist past, offering a critical understanding of the very conditions that define the present.

II. Terraforming the Albanian countryside

Albania's history of industrialization—albeit short and rapid—reflects the numerous changes the country has undergone in its recent history. After World War II, Albania was still a semi-feudal country, defined by social conservatism and outdated means of production. Adapting the Soviet model, the Albanian Party of Labor set out a series of five-year plans to industrialize the country. Whereas the First (1951–1955) and Second Five Year Plans (1956–1960) were preoccupied with agrarian reforms and developments in the agricultural sector, the Third Five Year Plan (1961–1965) saw the establishment of small handicraft factories. The main priorities during these years were the

electrification of the country and the construction of a railway system. The Fourth Five Year Plan (1966–1970) inaugurated a period of intense industrialization though, with large factory complexes erected on the outskirts of major cities. This emphasis on heavy industry was quite common among socialist countries. The intention was to employ heavy industry to support more industrial production to build socialism, rather than an industrial production whose end goal would be consumerism and profit, which is also a key difference between industrialization in the socialist world and that of the capitalist systems. It is this ideological framework that pushed industrial production in Albania beyond limits that were sustainable or feasible.

The history of industrialization in Albania also reflects the history of its changing alliances inside the socialist camp. Having cut ties with Tito's Yugoslavia as early as 1948, the first chapter of industrialization beginning at the close of the 1940s and through the 1950s took place within the framework of an alliance with the Soviet Union. In this context, the construction of industrial sites, as well as the acquiring of the new skills and expertise needed to sustain them, "invited Albanians to think of themselves as part of a greater world", engaging "the globalizing language of socialism".[8] By 1960–1961, however, Enver Hoxha had cut ties with the USSR over the process of de-Stalinization initiated by Nikita Khrushchev in 1956.[9] The Albanian-Soviet split coincided with the Chinese-Soviet split, and the second

[8] Elidor Mëhilli, *From Stalin to Mao: Albania and the Socialist World*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2017, p. 13.
[9] Ylber Marku, "Shifting Alliances: Albania in the Early Cold War", *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 24, no. 3, Summer 2022, pp. 80–115.

chapter of Albania's industrialization during the state socialist period is closely linked to the forging of a new alliance with the People's Republic of China, which shared Albania's Stalinist approach and challenged the diplomatic and economic dominance of the USSR inside the socialist camp in the 1960s. While China supplied Albania with military aid as well as substantial economic assistance and scientific expertise to develop its heavy industry, Albania was China's strongest ally in Europe. However, by 1978 the establishment of Sino-American diplomatic relations meant that the ideological differences between the two countries were too significant to maintain an alliance. The 1980s found Albania isolated diplomatically and pursuing economic self-reliance.

The process of industrialization was a prominent theme in many paintings produced in the late 1960s. The construction of new towns and the erection of large industrial sites became a symbol of progress and modernization in socialist aesthetics. In this new man-made world, nature, a dominant theme of landscape painting, was no longer associated with its previous romantic depictions that were frequent in the 1950s.[10] In the industrial landscapes, elements of nature have been replaced by factory chimneys, electric wires, and pylons. The Albanian artist and art critic Andon Kuqali observed in 1963 that in "places where new life is being built" nature and society always change, and the artist's role is to capture these changes.[11] And indeed, the

[10] Ermir Hoxha, *Historia e Artit Shqiptar 1858–2000*, Tirana: Albdesign, 2019, p. 113.
[11] Andon Kuqali, qtd. in: Ermir Hoxha, *Historia e Artit Shqiptar 1858–2000*, p. 144.

changes were rapid. The process of transforming lakes, marshes, and swamps into cultivated land in the south, damming rivers for hydropower plants in the north, and establishing new urban centers across the whole country in order to accommodate the newly created working class were activities that more than "changes" resembled a rupture in the previous relationship that humans had with nature, with the land and, inevitably, with each other. This rupture was reflected in the collective mobilization of the whole of society, most notably through *aksione*, which were large-scale voluntary labor campaigns that engaged – primarily – the youth and students in agricultural projects as well as in the construction of key infrastructure such as railways, roads, and plantations.

Of all the paintings that depict the process of building Albania's "new world" and its "new life", what astonishes me the most is a painting titled *Hapja e tokave të reja* (*The Opening of New Lands*) realized by Pleurat Sulo in the mid 1970s. It depicts two young men forcefully removing a tree stump which has been wrapped and is being dragged with a rope. The color of their trousers gives away that they are members of the army, employed to clear the land, preparing the soil for farming operations. The two men are depicted strong and brave while trying to pull out what looks like the last remnants of a tree. The background of the painting also shows more men who have eradicated every remaining green entity, leaving behind a deserted land. The opening, crafting, and shaping of new land was a process of *terraforming* the Albanian countryside. Characteristic examples of this process would be the controlling and damming of rivers to produce hydroelectric power, the expansion of irrigation

systems, and the growth of farming lands. Most notably, agricultural terraces were also created to convert steep and otherwise unusable hillsides into productive farmland, a labor-intensive process, often performed during *aksion*. These activities—more than simply transforming specific sites or landscapes—manifest the great ideological transformation of nature: natural resources, the land, and landscape were employed in building the socialist ideal.

The term "terraforming", although initially associated with fictional accounts of modifying a planet to be a more habitable environment, has been used more recently to describe the various processes of molding, shaping, and geo-engineering the land, rivers, and lakes of our own planet. This type of human activity has fundamentally shaped the biosphere and the surface of the Earth to a point where it is impossible to speak of nature without its socio-political, cultural, and economic life.[12] The escalation of human activity since 1945 has been so exponential that researchers have named this historical moment the "Great Acceleration", an era driven by extractivism and exploitation of natural resources.[13] Although this has been examined as a lived experience of the capitalist West, the changes that were unfolding in the socialist world were also rapid and intense. For instance, following the Russian Revolution in 1917, the Soviet Union "was transformed forcefully, feverishly and violently into an industrialized society", which could rival "the most advanced

[12] For an extensive analysis of environmental art and ecology see: Maja and Reuben Fowkes, *Art and Climate Change*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2022.
[13] See J. R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*, Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

industrialized capitalist countries".[14] The quest for industrial or scientific progress became even more intense during the race of the Cold War, which researchers have noted would bring about a war on nature itself.[15] Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that environmental histories of Eastern Europe are nuanced by Western anti-communist sentiments, which have perpetuated the argument that socialist regimes did not care about the environment. However, a closer engagement would contradict such views. For instance, Eglė Rindzevičiūte highlights that the Earth system governance concepts developed in the Soviet Union included policies centered on the limitation and scalability of human intervention in the biosphere.[16] This relatively unknown body of knowledge not only destabilizes the perception of the West as the center of environmental knowledge production, but also presents alternative environmental policy models not driven by endless accumulation and profit.

Not all socialisms were the same, and of course, we cannot compare environmental degradation in the socialist worlds with the extractive capitalism of the West whose consequences have been devastating for the Global South. Nevertheless, it is important to engage with the lesser-known environmental history that is still inscribed in the terraformed landscapes of the

[14] Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro, *Socialist States and the Environment: Lessons for Ecosocialist Futures*, London: Pluto Press, 2021, p. 41.

[15] Paul Josephson, "War on Nature as Part of the Cold War: The Strategic and Ideological Roots of Environmental Degradation in the Soviet Union", in J. R. McNeill and Corinna R. Unger, eds., *Environmental Histories of the Cold War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 21–50.

[16] Eglė Rindzevičiūte, "Soviet Policy Sciences and Earth System Governmentality", *Modern Intellectual History* vol. 17, no. 1, 2020, pp. 179–208.

Albanian countryside and rural peripheries. The exploitation of nature was invasive, not only for the natural environment itself, but also for the local communities that relied on natural resources to secure their survival and were continuously overlooked by those in power. For instance, historian Artan Hoxha, analyzing the historical and social process of turning Maliq, an area in the south of Albania, from a swampland into a core center of sugar production, writes that this intervention was "an enterprise of internal colonization" during which the regime "considered the plain of Maliq as empty and unutilized space",[17] without taking into consideration the previous ways in which the peasants were utilizing and inhabiting the larger area. While the transformation of Maliq into an industrial center of sugar production reflects Albania's path to socialist modernity, Hoxha argues that the present ruination of the sugar refinery represents a "second modernity" that this time reflects the country's path to reach the new European utopia:

> "The factory symbolized the security of livelihood and social order. With its disappearance, no other mechanism has replaced it. The people living there contemplate the end of the age that created them and realize that their fate is taking a direction they cannot control."[18]

This sense of precarity was actualized with rapid

[17] Artan R. Hoxha, *Sugarland: The Transformation of the Countryside in Communist Albania*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2023, p. 6.

[18] Artan R. Hoxha, "A Swamp, a Forbidden Grove and a Ruined Factory in a Corner of South-eastern Albania. From the Heterotopia of First Modernity to Dead Zones of Second Modernity", *Südost-Forschungen* no. 80, 2021, pp. 289–326 (p. 307).

privatizations: 490,000 new private farms were created in 1991,[19] replacing what was once a state-owned enterprise during the socialist regime, and before that, a wild uncultivated and free land. Hoxha approaches the de-industrialized area of Maliq as a "heterotopia"[20] to argue that in both instances of these two modernities, one fueled by the promise of a socialist utopia, and the other by the dream of capitalist progress and private ownership, have brought inequalities and local struggles that in both historical moments have contradicted the promises of development.

Hoxha's argument using Maliq as a case-study could also be applied to other parts of Albania's countryside. For instance, the former urban and industrial centers of the north initially produced a similar sudden rupture, in the sense that they dislocated its existing peasant communities—whose lives were deeply rooted in the mountains—by transforming them into workers that were employed in the mining industries. These workers were easier to control and discipline than the previous peasant communities. However, the collapse of the socialist regime dismantled the mining industry, bringing unemployment and eventually large waves of both internal and external migration. The centralization of urban development in the capital of Tirana after the collapse of the socialist regime, deprived rural areas that to this day have

[19] Ibid., p. 305.

[20] Heterotopia is a term introduced by Michel Foucault to talk about places of the "other", meaning sites that occupy actual space, but are strange, different, and unconventional, and that challenge dominant places of order. See: Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias", *Architecture, Movement, Continuité* no. 5, October 1984, pp. 46–49.

the highest poverty rates.[21] The decline of industrial activity was a sudden rupture that made local communities dispossessed, displaced, and more vulnerable to exploitation. In the town of Bulqiza, the private companies that still operate the chrome mines are largely unregulated, paying workers low salaries, using outdated equipment, and in dangerous conditions. At the same time, the state of precarity has also led many people, the majority of whom are elderly women and children, to informal labor.[22] The previous factories have disappeared, but a working-class population remains, only that now it has become more invisible and susceptible to exploitation.

By the 1980s it was already obvious that such a heavy industry was impossible to maintain in a largely isolated country where economic self-reliance had become the sole vehicle for pursuing the socialist ideal. However, it was the collapse of the socialist regime in 1991–1992, and the transition to a neoliberal democracy that rendered the former factories and industrial infrastructure redundant. Albania's history of industrialization, which was modernity at its peak, challenges dominant post-socialist perceptions of the country as being "isolated" or having a "backward economy" since foreign aid, exchanges, and alliances with other parts of the socialist world were fundamental for the development of industry. At the same time, it also highlights that while the communist regime saw nature as a

[21] Dorina Pojani, "Urbanization of Post-communist Albania: Economic, Social, and Environmental Challenges", *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* vol. 17, no. 1, April 2009, pp. 85–97.
[22] Daniel Göler, Matthias Bickert, and Dhimiter Doka, "Kromi çan bllokadën – Albanian Chromium Mining Revised", *Journal of the Geographical Society of Berlin* vol. 146, no. 4, 2015, pp. 271–288 (p. 281).

resource that had to be exploited in reaching the communist utopia, in the new capitalist reality the inherited socialist landscape was transformed into waste, an unwanted infrastructure, something unvaluable that had to be discarded, abandoned, or ideally, re-valued through privatization. In fact, its ruination became the new process of facilitating corrupt privatizations.[23] Whereas in the first instance the transformation of nature is driven by socialist realism, in the second instance it is driven by capitalist realism, which Mark Fisher defines as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it".[24] While socialist ideology was omnipresent and explicitly visible in every aspect of everyday life, capitalist ideology is instead imposed as an invisible normality. Abandonment, unemployment, and mass migration—which were the immediate consequences of the closure of factories—have become the new norm of Albania's recent history.

However, in addition to the visible post-industrial materiality that affects humans and society, engaging with the transformation of nature and its many environmental histories requires us to also pay attention to matters that, although invisible to the human eye, have tangible effects on the materiality of both human and non-human lives. For example, an environmental

[23] Ylber Marku and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, *Kina, Shqipëria dhe Arkitektura*. Talk given at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and the Study of Art (Academy of Albanian Studies), Tirana, 15 March 2023.
[24] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?*, Winchester, UK and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2009, p. 2.

report conducted by the United Nations in 2002[25] shows that toxic pollutants such as chromium, iron, and copper were present in a number of water bodies, soil, and air, with the metallurgical complexes in Elbasan and in Burrel having the highest concentrations. Similar research from 2018[26] shows that industrial sites inherited from the socialist era are still leaking industrial substances that are toxic both for human and non-human life. Meanwhile, industrial sites that are currently operating emit additional pollution due to unregulated waste management and outdated means of production, and this causes new environmental issues, such as the oil well blast at the Patos-Marinza site in 2015. Despite the recent investments in eco-tourism, there is not much consideration about environmental issues, such as waste management and energy infrastructure. This is another element that deconstructs the dominant perceptions after the fall of the Iron Curtain, which kept reproducing a "prevailing black and white image of the 'clean' capitalism and 'dirty' communism".[27] More than actual critical engagement with the environmental histories of the socialist world, such views reproduced the myth of capitalist victory over

[25] Economic Commission for Europe, *Environmental Performance Reviews Series No. 16: Albania*, New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2002, https://unece.org/DAM/env/epr/epr_studies/albania.pdf [last accessed: 12 January 2024].

[26] Economic Commission for Europe, *Environmental Performance Reviews: Albania*, third series synopsis, New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2018, https://unece.org/DAM/env/epr/epr_studies/Synopsis/Albania_ECE.CEP.183_Synopsis.pdf [last accessed: 12 January 2024].

[27] Simo Laakkonen, Viktor Pál, and Richard Tucker, "The Cold War and Environmental History: Complementary Fields", *Cold War History* vol. 16, no. 4, 2016, pp. 377–94 (p. 388).

communism. Despite the arrival of democracy and neoliberal progress, environmental and social injustices did not stop when the lived history of communism stopped.

How is one then to approach matters whose temporalities exceed the single time of their event? The rapid changes that were imposed in the race toward the "new world"—including both the socialist and the capitalist visions of what that entailed—have created a post-socialist landscape that bears witness to the many abrupt transformations. If once upon a time the role of artists was to capture the rapid changes, perhaps in the current condition the role of the art is to question and resist the changes. This requires a shift in our relationship with time, something that could potentially form the basis for a new "politics of time" as Boris Groys, among others, has argued in recent years. Noting that during modernity the present was a negative experience that had to be overcome for the sake of the future, Groys argues that "ours is a time in which we reconsider—not abandon, not reject, but analyze and reconsider—the modern projects", so that "to be contemporary means […] to be 'with time' rather than 'in time'".[28] I would add that, insofar as the contemporary condition is defined by continuous precarity, increasing uncertainty, and the accumulation of crises—as a time that has lost its ability to imagine a future—then slowing-down and engaging anew with the many inherited genealogies of rupture that exist in the present is yet another method of reclaiming the contemporary moment. The next section explores the ways in which contemporary artists

[28] Boris Groys, "Comrades of Time", *e-flux* no. 11, December 2009, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61345/comrades-of-time/ [last accessed: 2 May 2024].

have engaged with what remains in the post-socialist landscape. By bringing into critical proximity the distinct elements that constitute the post-socialist landscape—for instance, factories, terraformed landscapes, industrial wastelands, and landfills—the aim is to detect the ways in which all these are equal parts of the material archive that bear witness not just to the past, but the ongoing present.

III. Haunted landscapes of transition

The material remnants inscribed in the post-socialist transitional landscape become the immediate entry point to capture that which remains. In this sense, landscapes are also the very material archives of accumulated pasts and of the present. Here, the term "landscape" is not simply about the actual elements of what constitutes a physical place and its surrounding. The sociologist Alice Mah, in her study on post-industrial landscapes of ruination follows cultural geographer Sharon Zukin's definition of "landscapes as an ensemble of material and social practices, and a symbolic representation of these practices".[29] To this end, Mah argues that industrial ruination is never about the ruins that remain behind, but about the very process that brought these landscapes of ruination. Similarly, the post-socialist landscapes still bearing the scars of past interventions contain not only the visible materiality, but also their associated immaterial socio-political realities.

Edi Hila's paintings, created in the 2000s, particularly series such as *Transitional Landscapes* and *Paradox*, have managed to

[29] Alice Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012, p. 12.

capture moments that slow down the flow of time and remain somewhat frozen in an undefinable temporality. This comes perhaps in contradiction with the very element that the paintings are dealing with. Transitions contain sudden and rapid shifts. They bring about the dismantling of a previously given reality and its replacement with another. They suggest some type of movement or change. And yet, Hila's paintings slow down the very process of time. When buildings appear in these paintings, it is not clear whether they are being constructed, or whether the artist captures a disruption in the process that has left those buildings unfinished and incomplete. Former communist bunkers merge almost naturally with people lying on a sandy beach in the shadow of an ominous ship (a symbol that inevitably brings back memories of those who fled the country in the 1990s). People going about their everyday lives—these are all depictions of moments sealed in a temporality that does not quite belong to either the past or the future, either the "now" or the "after" which was meant to come. The few blurry figures of people who are present in these landscapes appear spectral, almost like ghosts whose activities are never fully captured or revealed.

Compared to Hila's earlier works, one can also notice the radical shift in the artist's color palette. Muted and monochromatic colors, which intensify even more the eerie element of the transitional landscapes, have replaced the vivid colors and the collective movement of people that is present in paintings such as *Mbjellja e pemëve (Planting of the Trees*, 1972). The painting, commissioned by the Albanian National Assembly, depicts a group of young people planting trees in an orchard, probably during an *aksion*. The predominant bright blue

and green colors in the painting embrace in a common movement both the trees and the workers. This painting has been read as a "romanticized view of *aksion* propagated by Socialist Realism", when in fact it portrays a nature that "is as tormented as its people, both seeking to escape regimentation".[30] While socialist modernization saw nature as a terrain for extending its ideological reach, a reading of this relationship with nature only in vocabularies of suffering and trauma diminishes the very ambiguity of the painting that makes it distinct. Contrary to the strenuous manual labor that is present in the majority of visual depictions of workers and peasants in the Albanian socialist landscape, Hila has captured an almost ritualistic dance that takes place between the human and non-human elements of the landscape. It is this euphoric element of the painting that led to a dispute with the regime, eventually leading to Hila being sentenced to a "re-education" labor camp.

While in Hila's socialist painting, both nature and humans are present, evoking the very element of being and living in a specific time, in his transitional landscapes both the natural environment and the human figures appear as if they no longer occupy actual space or time. In fact, the sense of homogenous time is replaced by co-existing temporalities. These post-socialist paintings capture on their surface the "ghostly matters", to use Avery Gordon's term, a manifestation of expectations not actualized and failed promises of a progress that never arrives.

[30] Dorina Pojani and Elona Pojani, "Conceptions of 'nature' and 'the environment' during socialism in Albania", in Jasna Mariotti and Kadri Leetmaa, eds., *Urban Planning During Socialism: Views from the Periphery*, London: Routledge, 2023, pp. 244–67 (p. 262).

Haunting is never simply about the history that it represents.[31] More crucially, haunting, occurring in times and spaces of crisis, unsettles concrete "lines that delimit a zone of activity or knowledge".[32] Haunting then contains a subversive potentiality about it, re-establishing rapport with all lost utopias of the past, but also a critical framework to address injustices of the present.

The above becomes particularly evident when we engage with the very temporal paradox of transition. Even if we can accept its start in Albania in 1990, when the communist regime was collapsing, it becomes impossible to define its ending point, or if indeed this point has yet to be reached. At the same time, transition, as a narrative, shaped collective readings of what was before, justifying its reality as the inevitable outcome of the 'grand failure' of socialist projects. In the post-socialist landscape, then, haunting is not simply the aftermath of transition. Haunting occurs exactly because the socialist past still

[31] Jacques Derrida first introduced the concept of "hauntology" in *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Written in 1993 in the aftermath of the collapse of the socialist regimes, the book was a response to conservative voices such as that of Francis Fukuyama, who rushed to announce the "end of history" and the triumph of Western (neo)liberal democracy. Contrary to such views that saw the future as universal and homogenous, hauntology suggests that there will always be moments of rupture where the past's futures haunt the present. A useful reading of the notion of hauntology is that of Fredric Jameson, who noted of the figure of the ghost that "all it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity". See: Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter", in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, London & New York: Verso, 2008, p. 39.

[32] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 63–4.

resides in the present, challenging concrete lines between the 'then' and the 'now'. However, the collapse of the socialist regime, a rupture in the canonical progress of time, can become a potential horizon for re-engaging with the contemporary present that shapes post-socialist landscapes.

The above becomes particularly evident in Armando Lulaj art project *NEVER*, part of *Albanian Trilogy: A Series of Devious Stratagems*, which was presented at the 2015 Venice Biennale. With this project, the artist revisits Mt. Shpirag in Berat, re-writing what had once been carved in the natural landscape. Here, the process of re-writing is not metaphorical, but it becomes an actual praxis. In 1968, when the relationship between China and Albania was at its peak, a geoglyph of the dictator's first name was created by young people and the army on the mountain slopes: *ENVER*. This was an act which coincided with the development of the Mao Zedong Textile Factory in the valley below the mountain.[33] Geoglyphs were a common tool to showcase political power not only in socialist Albania, but also in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. In the 1990s, after the collapse of the socialist regime, attempts to destroy Hoxha's name by using military equipment did not manage to erase what was written in the land. Eventually nature took over, hiding the surface under heavy vegetation. Lulaj's art project uncovers the hidden letters, only this time turning *ENVER* to *NEVER* by reversing the first two letters. To do this, the artist collaborates with a group of local farmers at what seems to be a laborious and

[33] Raino Isto, "'Weak Monumentality': Contemporary Art, Reparative Action, and Postsocialist Conditions", *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne / Canadian Art Review* vol. 46, no. 2, 2021, pp. 34–50 (p. 46).

tiring process of moving and carrying around rocks that are as heavy as the history they represent. The outcome of this art project is a video that depicts this process of re-writing the history inscribed in the mountain, juxtaposed with footage from *Shqiponjat marrin lartësinë* (*Eagles Take Height*), a documentary directed in 1974 by Marianthi Xhako.

At first sight, this art project might be perceived as an attempt to re-write the past, or to exorcize the ghosts of an oppressed and violent past. However, *NEVER* is more than that. In a reality of rapid transformations and unregulated private accumulation, Lulaj revisits an inherited landscape, excavating and bringing back to light something from the past that becomes a message to the present. It is a message about the promise of a democratic future that was not actualized with the transition to neoliberal democracy. The artist elaborates on this further:

> "There is yet another aspect of NEVER that has to do with the idea of landscape, which started to change and transform itself radically beginning in the nineties. It concerns both the economy and surveillance. […] Here I'm not talking only about the disastrous ecological impact that private business has had on the environment and the damage it continues to inflict on nature. […] Rather, I'm talking about the fixed stare, the panoptic stare of the surveillance that surrounds each one of us nowadays and turns us into conscious prisoners and a homogeneous part of the landscape."[34]

Post-socialist landscapes, even those that seem empty or deserted, are in fact a depository of material testimonies that can

[34] Armando Lulaj and Marco Mazzi, *Broken Narrative: The Politics of Contemporary Art in Albania*, preface by Jonida Gashi. Earth, Milky Way: punctum books, 2022, pp. 46–47.

provide a critical entry point to make sense of the present, and perhaps of the future that is yet to come. These landscapes in addition to exploring what we have inherited from the past, inevitably ask us to consider what it is that we pass to those that are yet to come.

IV. Past and present waste(lands)

The socialist past has been used by many contemporary Albanian artists as a symbol to critique the present.[35] Similarly, the ruins of the former industrial sites have also been utilized as platforms to produce alternative knowledge that effectively critiques the socio-political reality of post-socialist Albania.[36] An Albanian artist who has incorporated the material remnants of Albania's post-industrial landscapes into their artistic practice is Ledia Kostandini. The artist has been using her artwork "as an instrument to go back and forth in time".[37] In the series *Purchasing Silence* (2012) the artist situates an iconic representation of a shopping trolley within the ruins of various abandoned factories in Albania. More than just going back and forth in time, an understanding of history in terms of linearity, this artwork merges together different temporalities, making

[35] See, for instance: Sofia Kalo, "The red kiss of the past that does not pass: State Socialism in Albanian Visual Art Today", *Visual Anthropology Review* vol. 33, no. 1, 2017, pp. 51–61.

[36] Dimitra Gkitsa, "Reclaiming Industrial Heritage through Affect: Art Interventions in the Ruined Factories of Post-socialist Albania", in Frances Guerin and Magda Szczesniak, eds., *Visual Culture of Post-Industrial Europe*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024.

[37] Ledia Kostandini, "Artist Statement", *Secondary Archive*, 2022, https://secondaryarchive.org/artists/ledia-kostandini/ [last accessed: 15 January 2024].

them ultimately part of the living present. The vivid pink color of the trolley that the artist juxtaposes with the industrial ruins, in many instances with the help of local people who happen to pass by when the artistic intervention takes place, stands in contradiction with the decay of the industrial ruins. At the same time, the shopping trolley, a symbol of consumerist desire, intensifies even more the undesirability of the industrial ruins of the past and their state of abandonment.

Whilst in the consumerist reality of the open market, things and products have their own value, Tim Edensor—who has written extensively on industrial ruins—observes that "in the ruin all objects are equal, none assigned higher value than others, because they are all categorized as trash. They are useless and worn out, and therefore possess no value and can be, indeed ought to be, discarded".[38] So, what exactly is Kostandini's shopping trolley doing amid the waste of the industrial ruins? Perhaps, this pink trolley becomes a connotation about the fate which might await these sites, being turned from wasted land into private properties or touristic endeavors.

I consider it important here to bring into this conversation on post-socialist landscape an attention to wastelands. Wastelands are mostly seen as desolate, unproductive and worthless. However, wastelands are simultaneously prone to rehabilitation and revitalization, activities that further distort the relationship with the natural world, reflecting the rapid transformation of public space in a profit-driven reality. As such, although an immediate response would be that the ruined post-industrial

[38] Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Spaces, Aesthetics and Materiality*, Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2005, p. 100.

landscapes are in essence wastelands, a further critical engagement would also show that wastelands and ruined landscapes can also be the product of present activities.

Waste is almost never fully defined by its own actual presence, but more crucially it constitutes "a set of wasting relationships producing wasted human and nonhuman beings, then wasted places, and wasted stories".[39] Although the abandoned industrial sites might be an immediate and obvious example of wastelands, uncontrolled waste dumps can be found across all Albania. While Kostandini embraced the materiality of the post-socialist wastelands to raise questions about consumerism, ownership, and privatizations, in 2021 Harabel, an art organization co-directed and co-founded in 2018 in Tirana by artist Driant Zeneli and lawyer Ajola Xoxa, who is also the wife of the Mayor of Tirana, invited contemporary artist Sislej Xhafa to produce a public art installation on top of the Sharra landfill, the oldest waste dump site located outside Tirana. This site has been a source of pollution and a public hygiene hazard for decades. Researchers and activists have revealed high concentrations of arsenic in the soil around the landfill. Waste that enters the river Erzen pollutes water and the coast. Meanwhile, residents in the area are further exposed to the toxic smoke and dust emitted in the air. In addition to these environmental concerns, the Sharra landfill is a contested site after the death of a teenage boy who lost his life in 2016 while working in the landfill without a proper permit or insurance. The landfill, which is under the responsibility of the Municipality of

[39] Marco Armiero, *Wasteocene: Stories from the Global Dump*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 2.

Tirana, has been operated by a private company. More recently, there have been discussions to create a green area that would also function as a contemporary art sculpture park managed by Harabel. *Bleta* (*Bee*), the art installation that Sislej Xhafa was invited to create on top of the landfill, was supposed to be part of a series of public art commissions. But who exactly is the "public" in a space that has been defined and marked by the activities and operations of private companies?

Bleta, which in essence is a window frame with a mosquito net standing amongst the newly planted trees of the landfill raises both ethical and political questions about art's role, and more crucially its site-specificity within a landscape that has been marked by an accumulation of slow violence. This violence is both a violence against the environment itself, but also against the many working-class bodies whose stories, memories, and experiences are either omitted from the public space, or worse turned into another commodity, this time by the art capital. I borrow here the term "slow violence" from Rob Nixon, who defines it as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all".[40] In the context of *Bleta*, the neglectful relationship with the slow violence of its site is further intensified by the many bottle caps that were in the background of the poster used to promote Xhafa's artwork. As Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei highlights in his review of *Bleta*, this element inevitably bears connotations to the Roma communities who make their

[40] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 2.

living by scavenging for recyclables in the landfill while suffering constant discrimination and racism.[41] The process of "beautifying" the surface of a landscape that bears the scars and memories of violence, without critically engaging with it, becomes another commodification. Meanwhile, vocabularies of "regeneration" and development conceal the accumulated social and environmental injustices of its public space.

While Sislej Xhafa overlooked the difficult "memory-work" that comes when working with contested sites, Pleurad Xhafa's *Tireless Worker* (2013) documents the life of a worker in a cement factory on the outskirts of Tirana. During the socialist regime, this same factory was utilized for the production of bunkers. Pleurad Xhafa explains that the worker, the main protagonist of the film, has been working in the same factory since 1973. During the state socialist era, he received a "Tireless Worker" Medal of Honor from the then-brigadier of the factory, who (after the transition to neoliberal democracy) became the owner of that same factory.[42] Instead of making an "abstract" artwork that facilitates disengagement and distance from difficult aspects of recent history, Pleurad Xhafa calls the viewer to witness the very specific everyday life of a worker. With his camera, the artist depicts the main protagonist walking to work in the morning, narrating his memories and his personal experience from the factory, or doing strenuous manual labor. In

[41] Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, "Death, the Sparrow, and the Bee: A Reading of Sislej Xhafa's 'Bleta' on the Sharra Landfill", *berfois*, 20 August 2021, https://www.berfrois.com/2021/08/art-at-sharra/ [last accessed: 2 June 2024].
[42] Raino Isto, "Contemporary Art in/and Public Space: An Interview with Pleurad Xhafa", *afterart*, https://afterart.org/tag/pleurad-xhafa/ [last accessed: 1 March 2024].

the background, the viewer notices the deprived areas that still exist just a few kilometers outside the capital, Tirana. The video, documenting the oral history of a single person, becomes a symbol that represents the invisible working-class population that exists not only in Albania's rural areas, but also in the urban centers. Representation, perhaps art's greatest strength, is ultimately a political and ethical act as it offers recognizability to social and political realities that would otherwise be forgotten or omitted from the public space. Pleurad Xhafa's *Tireless Worker* demonstrates that wastelands are not just inherited, and nor are they simply the outcomes of the socialist past. More crucially, they are also continuously produced and re-produced through present conditions of rupture that perpetuate precarity.

Albania's past and present wastelands contain material archives that are "an enlivening and reconfiguring of past and future that is larger than any individual",[43] inviting us to think of life as a connected nexus of relationships. Materiality is also closely connected to the ways in which we interact or understand our given reality. Barad observes that, "[l]anguage has been granted too much power… it seems that at every turn lately every 'thing'—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation".[44] If materiality becomes manipulated in cultural representations, or even in political representations, then establishing a different modality of understanding history becomes even more crucial at the present time.

[43] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007, p. ix.
[44] Ibid., p. 132.

V. Matters of memory

While contemporary artists in Albania engage with the material remnants of contested sites to build a critique of the present, the histories related to Albania's industrial past are not only enclosed within the country's borders. These histories travel and migrate, becoming new matters of memory. Doreida Xhogu, a contemporary artist of Albanian origin who is based in Athens, incorporates in her multimedia practice tar, a material that she collects from the mines of Selenica in Albania, the place where the artist was born and raised before her family migrated to Greece. Her artwork *Qengjat e vegjël* (*The Little Lambs,* 2022*)* is a project that includes nine sculptures made of wood and tar, materials that the artist had collected from the mines of Selenica, where her own father used to work as a geologist before migration. The sculptures, which resemble advent candles, are accompanied by a video that documents the process of making them. The video depicts the actual workers of the mine helping the artist to cut the wood and work with the tar, becoming an integral part of the art process. While the video juxtaposes the work in the mine with views of the village, the sound of the mining operations blends with the background voices of kids singing the traditional children's song *Qengjat e vegjël,* from which the artwork borrows its title. This song is the first trace that gives away a notion of nostalgia or personal memory. The fact that this artwork was presented in Greece, however, also means that the traditional song will inevitably be recognizable only to a very specific audience: Albanian immigrants, who otherwise would rarely receive any type of representation in formal institutions. As such, the song becomes the first element

that transforms the personal recollection of the artist into a collective memory.

When I first encountered Doreida Xhogu's artworks in ERGO Collective, an art space in Athens, I immediately felt a shared affinity, a shared experience that comes from being second generation Albanians in Greece. I also understood that what was for me the site of the Metallurgical Complex in Elbasan was for Xhogu the mining site in Selenica. In both cases, the material remnants become an entry point for memory-work. Xhogu explains that although at first glance tar might appear hard or sturdy, it is—in fact—malleable and delicate. It is also a material that requires a specific process and preparation to be workable. A characteristic of this process is that Xhogu completes her artworks in situ, with the raw materials that she finds in the mine and its surrounding area: straw, wood, sheep wool, and bitumen become malleable materials in the artistic process. The mining site is both the studio and the artist's familiar place that she knew from her own childhood, like the children's song that frames her artwork. During the socialist period, Selenica was the center of asphalt production, a material that is predominately used for constructing roads. It is the same material that the artist uses to carve a path to revisit her hometown. The artist explains in an interview the symbolic importance of the site:

> "Apart from the inconceivable charm of the material itself, Selenica is for me a very important place. It is the source, not only of tar, but also of memory. It is the first place I saw when I first opened my eyes, and my engagement with it through my

work is inevitable."[45]

The importance of the mining site more specifically, and of Selenica more broadly, was also present in the artwork *Miniera* (*The Mine,* 2020). This was a multi-media project including sculptures, videos, photographs, drawings, and a fieldwork diary. The ritualistic element that connects the materiality of tar with memory is more intense in this art project. The video part of *Miniera* shows the artist working in collaboration with the workers of the mine. The camera depicts them molding tar using other natural materials from the surrounding environment to create the sculpture of a human figure. By the end of the film, this human figure is burned. For the artist, this was a very ritualistic process to mourn her late father. The sculptural elements of this project, large flat plates made of tar that covered the gallery floor, are an extension of the ritual that happens in the video, almost factitively asking the visitors to become part of the same process. Understanding the materiality of memory requires a reconsideration of all its manifestations in human bodies, in material objects, in the physical environment and in its every other entity, in the urban and rural fabric. More importantly, it also requires seeing the relations and the affective ways in which the one can influence or alter the other. This renders material remnants susceptible to becoming matters of the present.

Although Xhogu's artwork might at a first glance appear as

[45] Despina Zefkili, "Doreida Xhogu: Η τέχνη είναι ακροβασία πάνω σε τεντωμένο σκοινί. Στη δική μου περίπτωση, αν πέσω θα βρεθώ σε καυτή πίσσα!" ["Doreida Xhogu: Art is acrobatics on tightrope. In my case, if I fall I will find myself in hot tar!"], *Athinorama*, 25 February 2022 [last accessed: 20 February 2024]. Translated from into English by the author.

a personal recollection, it opens a conversation about the formation of collective memory across different moments and sites. It is a manifestation of collective reality that is inscribed in Albania's recent history of migration and displacement. The materiality of post-socialist Albania is also a *matter* of memory for those who are no longer in its immediate proximity. The close connection with tar, which more than just a metaphor or a symbol is the very material reality that the artist remembers from her childhood in Albania, demonstrates how the ways in which we remember are inevitably linked to and influenced by the material world that surrounds us. Such a realization is not only theoretical, but also methodological in the sense that it requires us to take into consideration all the unvaluable, the wasted and mundane materials of everyday life, as well as all the affective entanglements that we develop with them. At the same time, such matters of memory are elusive and escape formalized narratives. Contrary to testimonial objects in museums or other remembering sites whose narratives and stories have already been pre-defined, the materiality of the everyday allows for diverse and pluralized ways of remembering.

VI. Conclusion

The artworks analyzed in this article are distinct from each other and contain diverse practices, methods, and intentions. Yet, they all engage with the material ramifications of memory that resides in Albania's landscapes. A crucial common element that occurs when working with the materiality of memory in places that have undergone rapid transformations, violence, and socio-political disparities is the re-establishment of connections with

the things that have been sealed away in the "past". This becomes even more crucial amid the present reality that has brought forward more uncertainties and crises. In fact, such recognition is an ultimate ethical and political responsibility. Here, I do not speak about the political as a synonym for politics or its formal political institutions, but rather as a standpoint that defines choices and relationships of everyday life, including of the past lives and lives that are yet to come. Karen Barad, in understanding the material perplexities of memory argues that,

> "[r]e-membering and re-cognizing do not take care of, or satisfy, or in any other way reduce one's responsibilities; rather, like all intra-actions, they extend the entanglements and responsibilities of which one is a part. The past is never finished. It cannot be wrapped up like a package, or a scrapbook, or an acknowledgment; we never leave it and it never leaves us behind."[46]

From the above, it occurs then that acknowledging previous chapters of history as something that we are done with, or as a problem that is not a matter of the now, takes away the very responsibility of the present. By the same token, the environmental history of Albania needs to be seen in tandem with the history of its society, if we are to go beyond the immediate matters of pollution, also acknowledging questions of privatization of resources and lands. At the same time, perpetuating an idea of the past as the only repository of injustice, puts forward the illusion that we have nothing more to deal with

[46] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007, p. ix.

in the present, ignoring all new "wastelands" that are being created in the meantime.

Albania's wastelands are not just sites of memories bearing witness to Albania's socialist past and its turbulent transition to neoliberal democracy. When major fossil fuel energy companies survey the country's rivers and countryside for oil extraction, and when other European countries export their waste to be processed and recycled in Albania, it inevitably brings the local in relationship to what happens on a global scale. Rob Nixon has observed that "[w]e may all be in the Anthropocene[47] but we're not all in it in the same way".[48] Like other similar locations that are the peripheries of global capitalist production, Albania's landscapes need to be re-visited as sites and moments that are closely linked to current pertinent environmental and social injustices as well as their movements of resistance. One example of such a recent moment of resistance might be the international campaigns and protests that activists organized to protect and bring visibility to the river Vjosa, one of the lesser known and researched river basins in Europe and the last river in the continent that has escaped dams. In 2023, the Albanian government signed a memorandum of understanding that protects the river and its tributaries as a national park. Of course, this decision has been taken at a time when Albania is investing

[47] The term "anthropocene" signifies a proposed geological time that is defined by the significant impact that human activity, especially in the dawn of late capitalist product, has on the natural environment.

[48] Rob Nixon, "The Anthropocene. The Promise and Pitfalls of an Epochal Idea", in G. Mitman, M. Armiero and R. S. Emmett, eds., *Future Remains. A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2019, p. 8.

in eco-tourism, an action that once again turns the natural ecosystem into a commodity that can be "sold" or "exchanged". In addition, plans to build a new airport on the delta of the river, which will disturb the local ecosystem and livelihoods alike, render the future of the river still uncertain. But this recent incident demonstrates that the exploitation of nature as well rapid transformation of urban and rural landscapes is not only a reality of the past. Private expansions in areas that might be turned into capital investments and complete abandonment and ruination in areas that remain on the periphery make current Albanian landscapes still precarious. Amid this reality, acts (artistic or otherwise) that re-establish a connection with the material witnesses that still inhabit such landscapes become ethical and political actions of the genealogy of the present.

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Fig. 1. Doreida Xhogu, *Qengjat e Vegjël*, installation view at ERGO Collective, Athens, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 2. Doreida Xhogu, with workers of the bitumen mine in Selenica, *Qengjat e Vegjël*, film still, 2022. Courtesy of the artist.