BALKANS OF COLOUR

THE ROMA RESISTANCE IN TIRANA

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LEVEL: BEGINNERS

ANALYSING ROMA SETTLEMENT AND EXPULSION FROM THE SUBURBS OF TIRANA

Some of the critical issues and keywords that the text below includes:

- Roma in Albania
- History of Roma in Albania
- Settlement of Roma in urban areas
- Eviction of Roma from their homes



Empathy is an important part of understading cultural differences and diverse ontologies than yours. Keep it in mind.

1 Roma in Albania From the Ottoman Empire to Socialism

There is indirect evidence that the Roma population has existed in Albanian society since Ottoman rule as an urban population. Roma groups dealt with blacksmithing, being members of small groups of nomads. However, there are data showing that even in the 1920s and 1930s, some Roma groups arrived from Turkey or Greece, settling mainly in the south of Albania.
After the Second World War, political power was taken over by the Albanian Communist Party. Partisans established themselves as a political system, the so-called "People's Democracy. In the holistic approach of the Albanian communists, their aim to transform the society would also attempt to "discipline" the Roma community. Government bodies were also devoted to taking measures for settling Roma at work. Plans for accommodating Roma into housing program were meant to "integrate" them into a valuable society. A particular emphasis was placed on their moral and political education, stripping Roma of the customs of the past and forcing them into work programs.



CAN YOU SPOT THE GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF TIRANA AND DURRES ON THE ALBANIAN MAP?

LEARN TO UNLEARN

A common misbelief in Albania, reinforced by media, television, and cinema, is that Roma communities do not want "normal" houses and that when they are offered proper accommodation, they leave it. This is simply a myth. Firstly, no accurate statistical data shows that most Roma people were offered proper accommodation and voluntarily decided to leave. Also, it is essential to note that flats given to Roma were often small and inappropriate to live in. Yet another issue regarded the access to the job market for Roma communities. When a Roma person was not offered a stable job, s/he should have become a blacksmith, a horse breeder, a basket maker, or an artisan. These positions, for which Roma were forced to move across the country, were mainly organised around picking up materials and selling them as products. These aspects pushed Roma communities to leave their homes against their will and search for a stable income to live on.

NEXT PAGE

As a result of these orders, the process of settling Roma in one place, mainly in urban areas, began. In general, Roma communities were sedentary in areas designated by the state. There, they were provided with opportunities for basic education and work. It should be also noted, however, that the Roma continued to be oppressed and discriminated societal segment of Albanian society.

Postsocialist period:
The Expulsion of Roma from their houses

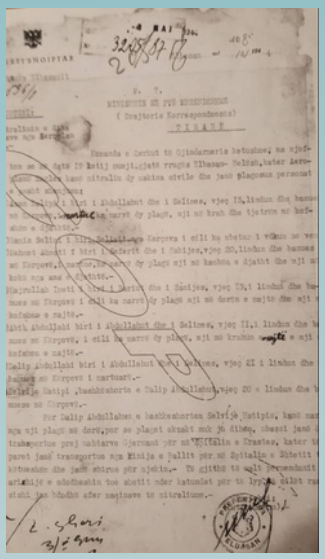
With the tremendous social changes that took place in Albania in 1991, there was an incredible upheaval in social relations, which were characterized by the significant movement of the rural population towards Tirana and Durres, the two main cities of Albania, offering more economic opportunities.

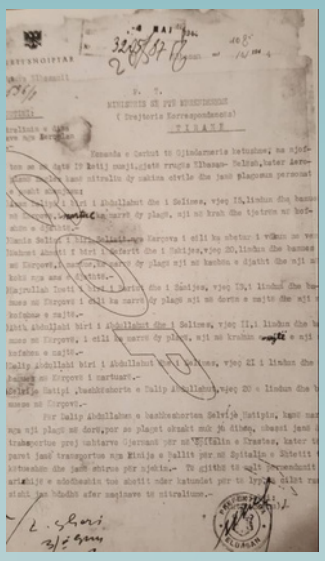
In the Albanian capital, Tirana, Roma communities used to live on the outskirts since the early 1950s. With the beginning of the construction of residential areas, Roma families were violently expelled from their homes. The State provided neither minimal compensation nor a temporary shelter for securing their communities. The State-run campaign of dispossession of lands was carried out to justify that the former Roma properties should have been returned to their rightful owners. The latter had decided to build new modern palaces in those areas, regardless of the fact that former residents were expelled and left homeless.

In the name of legality and property rights, the houses of the Roma, who have lived there for decades, were destroyed. In the name of market freedom, Roma were not offered any housing options or other opportunities. Since then, they have been left "free" to survive by finding sustainable accommodations and making their living in the market.



2 STIMULUS MATERIAL





The two photos on the left are archival documents about Roma's presence, activities, and injuries during WWII.

PHOTO CREDITS

Ivana Dervishi





Residents displaced from the Selita neighborhood were found concerned because, as they said, their houses were built before the fall of the socialist regime with effort and sacrifice. They also confirmed that the announcement of the demolition of their homes had arrived out of the blue. No housing options were provided to them. Other residents said that the Roma communities, similar to Albanian society, are very attached to their homes and have invested all their life savings in building one house. They were very attached to the houses as they had invested much savings and energy. However, within a few days, they lost everything.



New Boulevard of Tirana, Albania

PRACTICES & EXERCISES

After reading the texts above and looking at the STIMULUS MATERIAL, a reflection should be made on Albania's Roma. Focus on how the socialist regime treated Roma communities. Think of the Roma housing and the state treatment after the regime's fall in 1991.

TOO DIFFICULT?
Read other materials about Roma settlements in Albania.

READ NEWS
the journalistic article and listen to TV chronicles about the expulsion of the Roma community from their homes in Tirana suburbs.

SPEAK OF HUMAN RIGHTS
and precisely of the right to land. Do you think property rights and/or right to housing for everyone should be the priority for Roma communities in Albania?

SET UP A RESEARCH GROUP
in order to investigate the mistreatments of the Albanian socialist regime about "normalization and modernization" of Roma people.

DISCUSS THIS DIALEMMA
Between a dictatorial regime, which offers a minimum of welfare and economic security for the citizens, and the new liberal system, which in the name of freedom, development, market economy, and property rights, one takes into account the social security of its citizens?

The above activities can be performed both in groups and individually. Prepare a laptop and secure an Internet connection. If you do not possess any proficiency in Albanian, work in pair with an Albanian speaker



The New Boulevard of Tirana was built in the area of the former Train Station, also on the River Bank, from where the houses of many Roma families were expropriated and demolished. In 2020, the central government, together with the Municipality of Tirana, decided to give this area the status of "a priority area for tourism development." It resulted that all 4- and 5-star hotels built in the area and associated with international brand names continue to have zero infrastructure tax. Also, they have zero profit tax for the next 10 years, a reduction of VAT to 6% for the supply of other services offered in the hotel in addition to accommodation, and zero tax on the building. Roma communities did not benefit at all from this process of gentrification.

READING TIPS

Meta, Beqir. "Pakica malazeze, romet dhe hebrenjte gjate viteve 1925-1939." Studime historike 3-4 (2019): 133-1959.

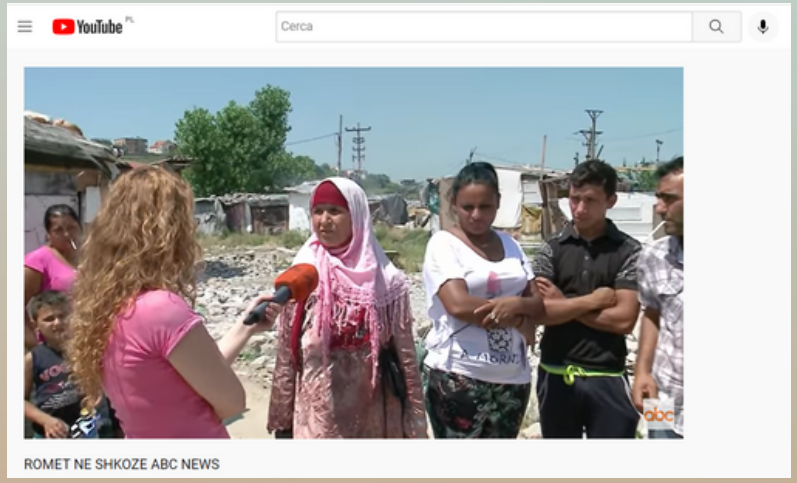
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Watch these short reportage for better understanding the issue of housing and exclusion of Roma in Albania



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbyHKyy7aOI



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYxMhyFUaIw

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