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THE CONTRIBUTION OF ESTABLISHING HOLOCAUST STUDY IN ALBANIA

Case studies

Keywords

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Unfreezing
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Abstract

The aim of this article is to contribute a practical study model based on long term, deep, mainly historical studies about the Holocaust in Albania. A similar model has already existed for the eight years in Bucharest, Romania. Based on its advantages and the needs in Albania I built a new model. The article describes the relevant historical background and raised the humanistic questions that have interested and challenged many historians over the last 20 years. The article is based on theoretical methods from other fields and integrates them into the original model. The model is divided into two parts that are interdependent. The conclusion and discussion summarize all the factors in order to convince the Albanian Ministry of Education and University of Tirana to adopt its idea.

Introduction

Immediately following WWII, the persecution and murder of close to 6 million Jews by Nazi Germany and its allies was perceived as one of a series of atrocities decisions carried out by a murderous totalitarian regime. Albania can be seen as a microcosm of the war in the rest of the Balkans and in Europe as a whole. Albania's unique internal conditions produced significant variations on the theme, and under a familiar surface, the complications were extensive. During the Italian occupation the fragmentation among the resistance, for example, was more severe than in other parts of the Balkans and in Europe. Albania's particular internal conditions, as well as German needs, allowed for the creation of some surprisingly independent occupation regimes. The war, in general, pulled Albania out of one form of isolation and propelled it into another. Prior to 1939, Albania was arguably the most isolated country in Europe (Fischer, 1984). Albanian historiography has only recently started to tackle the issue of the Holocaust. In the world of total moral collapse there was a small minority who mustered extraordinary courage to uphold human values. These 69 people received the prestigious recognition of being recognized as "Righteous among the Nations" by YadVasahem, The official commemoration institute of the state of Israel. They are part of 25,271 such "righteous" that have been recognized from the moment this project was launched in 1962 and is still ongoing (Table 1).

Albania is proud of their "Righteous among the Nations", as are other countries. Moreover, in recent years the YadVashem Righteous Department is being flooded by a staggering wave of requests for recognition. There are even lobby groups who try to exert pressure - some by applying to Israeli courts - to force the YadVashem Righteous Committee to recognize persons whom they feel should be recognized (Michman, 2008). Therefore, being a unique research subject in the entire story of the Holocaust, Albania is interesting because of its special features. I will focus on the management model I created for this purpose.

Theoretical Framework

Rogers (1995) claims that when an innovative factor is introduced in teaching/instruction/orders, there are various types of people who will adopt and implement the innovation differently. There will be those who will enter and integrate the change quickly, and there will be those who delay it, and there will be those who reject it. Those who accept the change quickly are called early adopters.

This method may affect the course of the new learning in the setting into which it is introduced (Cuban, 1987). In our case this means introducing a Holocaust Studies program at a university sponsored by the government of Albania.

Organizations are subject to frequent changes over time. Changes are a necessary and inseparable part of their ongoing effort to survive and adapt to the environment in which they function. A developing academic system is the one that stimulates improvement processes and integrates substantial changes. This is what expresses the educational ethos, according to Cuban (1987). However, this raises the question regarding the meaning of introducing change into an academic system and how can a change like Holocaust Studies affect university life, the student and the researchers at this institution. Stake (1995) claims that profound research on one case can allow understanding of a general social phenomenon. Therefore, all the measures related to introducing the study program must be tracked and examined over the period of several years (Levine, 1951), and adjustments must be made in accordance with the findings, such as expanding the program, disseminating it to other departments, inter-departmental cooperations, allocating research funds, etc.

Fuchs (1995) mentions four main aspects of introducing change processes. The process itself, the content of the change, the context in which the change is taking place and the people involved in it. The first aspect includes the characteristics of the change, its stages and its practical manifestation. The second aspect includes the type of the change, its scope, its depth and the forces accelerating or impeding its implementation. The third aspect relates to the organizational environment in which the process takes place and the internal contexts within it. The fourth aspect relates to the people involved in the process who lead its execution and are affected by it. Levine (1951) distinguished three important stages in the change process. The first is the unfreezing stage, which takes place when the balance between the forces pushing for change and forces opposing it is disrupted. Motivation for change is created in the organization. The movement stage is the second, and is created when intervention is implemented toward the change, and in which forces promoting change and impeding change are active. The third is the freezing process, which takes place when a new balance is struck in the system. This stabilization allows the change process to be evaluated and its results to be measured. (Stake, 1995) Opposition is an inseparable and unavoidable part of changes in individuals and systemic changes in organizations such as a university. This opposition intensifies when the organization functions in a developing society with clear indicators of a traditional society characterized by closed-mindedness and opposition to change. An organization usually develops an organizational culture which is affected by the society in which it function. Therefore, leading a change process in this type of reality presents an interesting challenge, and it is to be expected that its implementation and establishment will not be easy. In Bucharest, Romania, a department of Israel Studies was introduced into the SNSPA, a government sponsored university. This was done because students in the fields of politics, economics and government expressed interest in willingness to study and implement and integrate the fundamentals of the Israeli economy, which created a competitive private market and substantial organizational

changes which had a crucial effect on the private sector. Courses were added over the years and constituted a unit affiliated with the Department of Politics and Government which has existed for many years. However, throughout the years the unit has suffered from difficulties, especially budgetary, which destabilize it.

The Context

Albania, a small and mountainous country on the southeast coast of Balkan Peninsula, was home to a population of 803.000 during WWII. Of those, only 200 were Jews. After Hitler's rise to power in 1933 many Jews found refuge in Albania. Different sources estimate that 600-1,800 Jewish refugees entered that country from Germany, Austria, Serbia, Greece and Yugoslavia, in the hope to continue on the land of Israel or other places of refuge. Following the German occupation in 1943, the Albanian population, in an extraordinary act, refused to comply with occupier's orders to turn over lists of Jews residing within the country's borders. Moreover, the various governmental agencies provided many families with fake documentation that allowed them to intermingle amongst the rest of the population. The Albanians not only protected their Jewish citizens, but also provided sanctuary to Jewish refugees who had arrived in Albania (Hoxha, 2008). The protection of the Jews during the Holocaust has long been known in Albania. However, until 1990 the Albanian historiography had not presented anything about these facts. After the fall of communism, some Albanian scholars wrote several academic approaches related to this issue, focusing mainly on what drove Albanians to shelter the Hebrews during the Holocaust. These studies deserve special attention because they present very interesting theses. However, they also have some weaknesses which I believe are related mainly to the method of writing the history. These studies are based mainly on documents found in the archives, neglecting other sources, which somehow limits them. It would be hard to achieve a truly scientific historical approach without a prior detailed historical study of the circumstances, values and the time period in which the protagonists of these events lived (Hoxha, 2008). The protection of Jews is explained as being based on some characteristic values of the Albanians which distinguish them from other nations, This has led the Albanian authors to attribute the protection of Jews to the Albanians' ethic psyche (Sinani, 2014), to the hospitality and pledge of honor (Repishti, 2007), humanism, anti-fascism, and lack of hatred towards this people (Dell'Era, 2008), or to religious tolerance due to the presence of four different religions in the country (Nika & Vorpsi, 2006). Kotani (2013) interprets hospitality and trust, two important values of the Albanian ethical corpus, as two genetic traits of Albanians which are extended to all foreigners who come to Albania with good intentions. This thesis is widely used by Albanian scholars who believe that these two characteristics of Albanians are a source of pride. Therefore, these values became a legend and were attributed to all Albanians, raising the belief that they are rooted in the Albanians genetic code. Those explanations do not exist in academic research. Sinani's (2014) thesis states that it was the Albanian ethno type that rescued the Jews in Albania during the Holocaust which was also expressed in the attitude of the cooperative Albanian government. They possessed the list with names of Jews and they did not hand it to Germans. Only the historian A. Lalaj lists several values, as she acknowledges that hospitality alone would not be enough in explaining the sheltering of the Jews. An important role was played by the general anti-fascist spirit (Lalaj, 2004). Some of the factors Lalaj mentions are: the small number of Albanian Jews, the fact that they were not rich and thus were not envied by Albanians, which in turn could become hatred, and the Muslim religion which was not a source of the almost two thousand years old accusation of the Jews from the Christian world for Christ's crucifixion. She believes that all these factors "remain secondary elements in the framework of an objective analysis (Lalaj, 2004).

In my opinion, despite the grave importance of historical accuracy, the fact that 69 Albanian citizens risked their lives and were recognized as Righteous among the Nations speaks for itself. Their humanity and morality should receive no less depth in the discussion than the details of the historical events.

The Model Contribution

I was asked by a senior lecturer in the academy at Tirana to assist in establishing an academic learning center which would address the discussion on the subject of the Holocaust and the saving of Jews in Albania. I have engaged in this effort for the past several months. I will dedicate my opening lecture in Albania on October 12th to the subject of Albania and the Holocaust.

Since 2008 the University of Tirana has initiated conferences and symposiums on the subject of the Holocaust. Research has gained significant momentum over the past few years and interest has increased. Therefore, I built a model based on principals of the field of organizational management and administration which were detailed in the second part of this paper.

A sub-department of Holocaust Studies will be opened within the History Department. This sub-department will offer a course of studies as part of a BA degree in Humanities and Social Sciences which will include two stages, as described in Figures 1A and 1B. The first stage will consist of two yearly courses (2 weekly hours each): the first is on the subject Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, with the goal of teaching the historical events between the two World Wars and the rise of Nazi Anti-Semitism as a background for the development of the central phenomena that characterized the Holocaust. The starting point is a wide view and dealing with various

research interpretations. The second is on the subject of Chronological, Ideological and Sociological Aspects behind the Rise of the SS State and the Industry of the Mass-Murder of Jew, with the goal of introducing the Holocaust into the history, the countries, peoples, regimes and humans who were participants in extremely complex and difficult events that humankind and the Jewish people experienced, compared to the humanism expressed by the Righteous among the Nations. The course will also cover the characteristics of the Jewish communities, which developed autonomous cultural and social systems and conducted relationships with the majority of the population and their leaders which allowed the existence of this autonomy. In addition, the first stage includes an optional guided tour of the death camps will be conducted at the end of the first year (Keren, 1998). At the end of the year parameters will be examined that will determine whether the model will be continued, changed or discontinued.

The second year of studies will focus on deepening the students' understanding of the Holocaust through elective semester-long courses on a variety of subjects: The Holocaust of the Balkan Jews, Albania and the Saving of Jews, Women in the Holocaust, Literature of the Holocaust in Poetry, Prose and Drama, Life in the Ghetto, and Culture, Education and Faith in the Ghetto. The goal is to develop broad thinking regarding issues in Holocaust research with student participation in discussions and panels, while stimulating curiosity and sharing recent disputes being researched today regarding the Holocaust. The courses will be accompanied by screening of documentary films and guest lectures.

Conclusion and Discussion

"Often documents are mute as regards the values of the society and spiritual atmosphere at the certain historical moment... But [the] events may not be rebuilt exactly if we neglect the main protagonists" (Hoxha, 2008). Therefore, Tirana University thought that Oral History is an important field of historical research, and would play an important role in studying the reasons that led Albanians to protect the Jews during the Holocaust. Gathering the memories of Albanian hosts would contribute in bringing to light the reasons why they rescued the Jews at that time. The interviews conducted by YadVashem and by Prof. Hoxha, who focused in his survey on different religious backgrounds of the savior, provide information on the degree of the impact that the religious beliefs had in protecting the Jewish people. It appears in all interviews.

In spite of the fact we are now 70 years after the Holocaust and most of the saviors are not alive, I find the ideas of their second and third generation important. They would be less emotional and could give other aspects such as:

Whether this is a tradition and at the same basis of understanding for the second generation regarding the saving of Jews/people during a crisis

Whether the second generation has criticism of the first generation's actions in view of the historical events of that period

The initiator of establishing a unit of Holocaust Studies in Albania is Dr. Bledar Ilia – an Albanian Jew who is now Dean of the Law faculty in the University Academy of Business in Tirana. He asked for my help after having the experience of lecturing at SNSPA University, raising a similar model but focusing on Holocaust Studies. Dr. Ilia is one of very few Jews who remain in Albania.

In 1991 Albania opened its gates and allowed citizens to leave the country. At that point the mission to bring Albanian Jews to Israel began. Most of the Albanian Jews live in Israel currently, with a small number in Greece and the USA. Nowadays, Albanian surnames still contain hints of Jewish origin such as the name Moisi. Jewish remnants are scattered across the country, such as tombstones at the Jewish synagogue at Vlore. (Rivlin, 1999)

Most researchers who took part in the 2008 convention, in collaboration with YadVashem and the University of Tirana (History Department), concluded in their lectures that there has much research into historical sources, but there is also much research left to be done. I've found that there is still considerable room for more in-depth research and analysis, and it is needed not only in field of History. It could be important to have more studies in Anthropology, Sociology, and Cross-Culture Studies regarding the Jews in Albania and their saviors. There are always new sources with which to work. "The protection of Jews was a result of collaboration of many material and moral factors which varied in different families, towns and regions. An important role was also played by the moral values which were rooted in Albanians' code of the ethics but their influence was not the same everywhere due to the interaction of other objective and subjective factors. A more accurate conclusion would require a more thorough and professional evaluation of each case." (Hoxha, 2008)

My model which I created in this article is offering a way to continue on the right track in bringing profound studies to light. As more students could participate in this study we will enrich it by different aspects and factors.

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Table 1
Distribution of the Righteous among the Nations by country

Albania	69	Italy	610
Armenia	24	Japan	1
Austria	95	Latvia	134
Belarus	601	Lithuania	871
Belgium	1,665	Luxembourg	1
Bosnia	42	Macedonia	10
Brazil	2	Moldova	79
Bulgaria	20	Montenegro	1
Chile	1	Netherlands**	5,351
China	2	Norway	52
Croatia	109	Poland	6,454
Cuba	1	Portugal	2
Czech Republic	114	Romania	60
Denmark*	22	Russia	189
Ecuador	1	Serbia	131
Egypt	1	Slovakia	539
El Salvador	1	Slovenia	7
Estonia	3	Spain	6
France	3,760	Sweden	10
Georgia	1	Switzerland	45
Germany	553	Turkey	1
Great Britain (Incl. Scotland)	21	Ukraine	2,472
Greece	321	USA	4
Hungary	810	Vietnam	1
Ireland	1		
Total:	25,271		

* The Danish Underground requested that all its members who participated in the rescue of the Jewish community not be listed individually, but commemorated as one group.

** Includes two persons originally from Indonesia, but residing in the Netherlands.

Taken from the YadVashem site¹

¹<http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/statistics.asp>

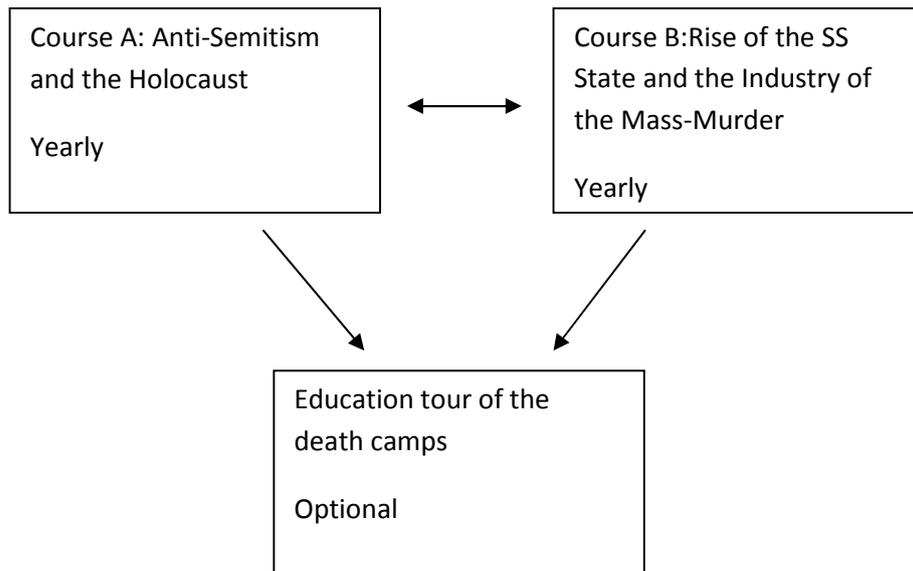
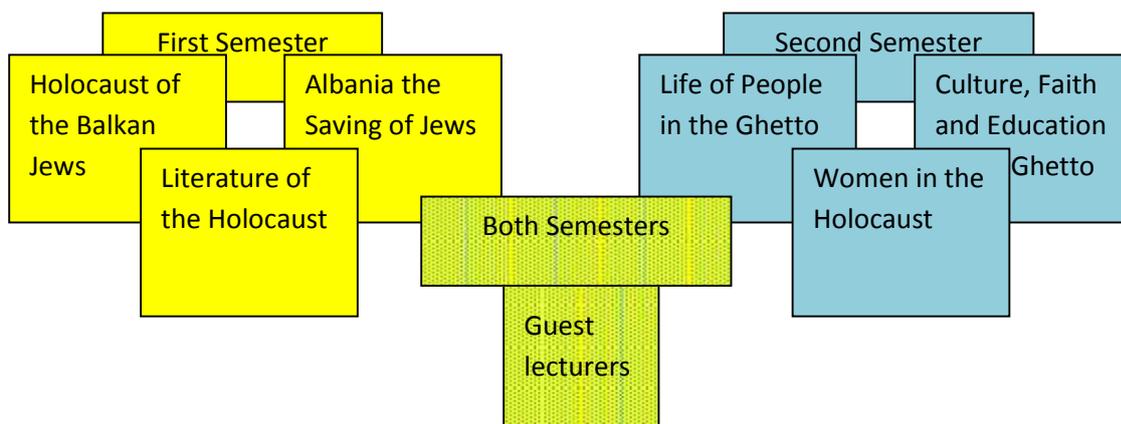


Figure 1A
Flowchart Describing the Holocaust Study Model for the First Year



*All courses include documentary films

Figure 1B
Flowchart Describing the Holocaust Study Model for the Second Year

