

The Beginning of State Institutions for Children without Parent Care, Period in the Beginning of Independence up to the Years of King Zog Governance

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Abstract

This paper aims to present an investigation into the historical context regarding the establishment of state institutions for children without parental care in Albania, for a period of time that starts from the first years of independence to King Zog's government. In order to realize this article we used various sources, including the Albanian Canons, information made available from the Albanian National Archives as well as information accessed from the Internet. This paper is based on a qualitative historical study conducted on care institutions nationwide. The method used for data collection includes data obtained from the files of the Albanian National Archives and the studies pertaining to the target group of children without parental care. The study answered the following questions: - How did the Albanian Canons solve the issue of parental rights in cases when the child lost one of the parents? - How was the first orphans' shelter (streha e parë vorfnore) founded in the 1912? Who deserves the credit for its establishment? - Why was the management of the orphans' shelter given to the Albanian Red Cross in 1921? - What were the problems of the orphans' shelter in 1924 when the country was characterized by political and social instability? - For what reasons was the orphans' shelter placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education?

Keywords: orphans shelter, Canons, the Albanian Red Cross, orphans

1. Introduction

The historic background of orphanages in Albania is not given due attention and unfortunately there are very few studies in this respect. Consequently, today there is considerable disinformation regarding the way the first institutions of this kind were created, omitting one of the major social problems that affected the Albanian society in years. This is not only a historical problem but a sociological one as well. Therefore, it deserves a deeper and rigorous investigation. It is of special importance to know when these collective institutions in Albania date back, since this was a widespread problem as a result of several phenomena that existed in that time such as: the on-going wars, the existence of blood feud, the economic difficulties faced by our people time after time etc. Lack of information is probably due to the late emergence of these types of institutions in Albania. According to archival documents analyzed, this kind of institution was established in the twentieth century. Before that time we cannot talk about these types of institutions since in most cases, orphans lived and stayed close to their mother's or father's relatives.

2. Methodology

To realize this paper we used the qualitative methods. Through these methods we provide meaning and explanation of case studies and research objectives from the historical and philosophical viewpoint, collecting data and information with the aim of comparing cases or simply based on a single case study. (<https://sq.wikipedia.org>)

Historical method comprises techniques and guidelines by which historians make use of primary sources and other evidence. To realize this paper we exploited files accessed from Albanian National Archives. In more than two months we analyzed various files in order to collect the necessary information and find the answers to our research questions. Historical method has a wider scope compared to the comparative method, because it includes comparative reports through various periods of time where are performed analyzes, clarification of developmental stages, developmental levels, and so on. (<http://www.slideshare.net/Menaxherat/metodologjia-kerkimore-shkencore-prof-dr-ali-jakupi>)

Historical method defines and identifies events, to be able to provide answers to the questions: when, where, how, why, under what circumstances the events happened, and what is their cause and effect. The flaw of this method is that in many cases there is no relevant material, due to the lack of actual resources. (<http://www.slideshare.net/Menaxherat/metodologjia-kerkimore-shkencore-prof-dr-ali-jakupi>)

3. Study Findings

If we refer to history, considering the fact that for a period of five centuries Albania was part of the Ottoman Empire, the solution of this problem should have come from the Ottoman state legislation. However, this appears not to have been the case because although Albania was occupied and considered an integral part of the Ottoman Empire, some of its regions, especially mountainous ones, operated on the basis of customary law or canons, an internal legislation which regulated social relations existing in the Albanian society. For this reason were created mechanisms to solve the problem from within the province not nationwide. Consequently, the Canons which regulated social problems also included the status of orphans and their adjustment until they reached adulthood. Canons gave particular importance to the fortune that someone had left to the child, so that he would not remain without support.

If we refer to the Albanian customary law, parental rights belonged to the father, and if the latter passed away the child had the right to stay in his father's family along with his mother. In cases when the mother remarried she could leave the child in the house of his father, so he would benefit from the inheritance left by the father. When the child lost both parents, in most cases he was raised by his relatives. (Aleks LUARASI, "Studies on the Albanian customary law, 1 Family Relations, Second Edition fq.96 Tirana 2007) "When a boy or girl was orphan a relative took care of them in the position of a guardian. The latter had the right to decide about their engagement in lieu of the father. Likewise, a guardian who raised a girl who had lost her father and whose mother had been married elsewhere, had the duty to ask the mother, but her consent was not necessary." Furthermore, Canons regulated and gave solution to a phenomenon that during the existence of blood feud and on-going wars against the invaders was sharp and widespread. It is impressive how many articles in canons are dedicated to the care of orphaned children. Everything was solved through kinship care, where the orphaned were fed and raised until they reached adulthood and could get married, thus creating a family of their own. "The adoptions were rare, but these, as a rule, were made within the kinship." In this context orphaned children not only grew up safe, but also were raised in a family environment where relatives cared for them. Canons give special importance to the family as the basis of society. "Relatives who were alone and without help also joined the family". Close kinship considered a duty and an honor to care per orphaned children. Even in this case the principle of blood relationships was the basis for acceptance in the family". Albanian patriarchal families regulated relations in this way.

After 1912, when Albania was declared independent, there are no archival documents that prove the establishment of orphanages in our country. Although the government of that time tried to solve a series of social problems that troubled the society, it failed, in the short period that it ruled, to find a solution to this phenomenon which had probably been widespread in our country. Apparently, for a long time the issue of orphaned children was settled by Albanian customary law, without creating institutions maintained by the state budget.

The status of Wilhelm Wied did even less to settle this issue, partly due to fact that the brief period of his governance intended to resolve the major problems that troubled the country. Later, the beginning of the First World War would certainly bring other problems, and of course that meant an increased number of orphans. During this period Albania was divided into four occupation zones, and the activity of the center was very limited. Yet, at the end of the First World War, when it seemed that the Albanian state authorities did not function properly, were created the conditions for the establishment of a charitable institution for raising children in need.

Based on archival documents, Albanian historiography takes for granted the fact that the first orphanage, which was called " Strehë Vorfnore", opened for the first time in 1917. The story begins with the misfortune of two orphans who had lost both parents, and were found by an Austrian officer in deplorable conditions. "At the end of April 1917, Rauf Fico, deputy prefect of Tirana, meets in his office an Austrian gendarme. He brings inside two small children, a five year old boy and a younger girl. The gendarme explains to deputy prefect Fico that the two children had been found eating grass in a thicket near Farka and then were brought in Tirana. After the first questions to the children it was clear that they were brother and sister. They claimed their parents had died in the mountain, coming from the Highland."

Moved by the deplorable conditions of the children, deputy prefect Rauf Fico tried to find a quick solution for the children at least for the night. "That night, the latter, had referred them to the well-known benefactor Zyber Hallulli. However, the next morning the deputy prefect would learn that the little girl had passed way during the night. Since then, he had not found relief. With the help of an Austrian officer and various well-known benefactors of the capital at the time (Mytezim Këlliçi, Ismail Ndroqi, Zyber Hallulli) was opened the first orphanage, a nest of love for orphans." So, that was the first step which would be followed by the opening of a number of institutions of this kind throughout the country.

"Twenty years later, the director general of the Albanian Red Cross Haxhi Shkoza, would ask Mr. Rauf Fico, at that time ambassador in Athens, data about the history of the foundation of the first orphanage. The story was written based on the memories of Mr. Fico, who added that inhabitants of Tirana collected 10,000 kronas, whereas the Austrian

commander himself would add 3,000 more."

In fact, there is still an open debate concerning the history of the creation of the first shelter for orphans. Who deserves the credit for its opening? Was it a merit of the diplomat Rauf Fico, whose efforts have been crucial in creating the first institution its kind in Albania, or the benefactor Zyber Hallulli's merit, the name of whom the institution holds to this day? Despite different ideas expressed by historians on this issue, what is worth mentioning is that this initiative served as a precursor to the opening of such institutions in all the cities of Albania. Various controversies exist regarding the exact date this institution opened, but the most accepted is the theory according to which it opened on the day of the fifth anniversary of the country's independence. "On November 28, 1917, on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of independence was opened for the first time the orphans shelter "Streha Vorfnore", by Zyber Hallulli, Mayor of Tirana. He brought together children from all over Albania, regardless of faith and province. Zyber Hallulli was devoted so much to the shelter, that with his will and desire, before his death he donated all his fortune to "Streha Vorfnore". With the passing of time the shelter became the institution, which we know today. Besides Zyber Hallulli, various merchants and benefactors of that time gave their contribution for the shelter such as: Myrtesim Këllici, Ismail Ndroqi, Hasan Vogli, etc. In 1994, "Streha Vorfnore" was named after its founder: Orphanage "Zyber Hallulli".

Historical data are scarce. Archived documents or histories do not exist. Some of those in the archives have been destroyed by the communist regime, where each "triumphant" changes and rewrites the history.

"Streha Vorfnore" opened in 1917 in Kavaja Street, where today is situated the Ministry of Labour. It is believed to have been located there until the early years of the communist regime. Later it moved to the place where it is today, which is thought to have been Zyber Hallulli's property, but whose maps disappeared during communism. There is no document to show the date when it moved to where the orphanage is today, but it is only known that it was named after the party's house "8 Nëntori" ("8 November). Whereas after '90 the orphanage was named "Zyber Hallulli" by the mayor of Tirana, Albert Brojka, in honor of the person who first opened the shelter. (<http://www.dritaislame.al/streha-vorfnore-misioni-i-pa-nderprere-ne-keto-100-vjet>) The opening of the first shelter for orphans in Albania was the most urgent action in those difficult times the country was facing, enabling the foundation of the first charitable institution to help orphans who had lost their parents during the war and mass misery.

The history of the first shelter for orphans would not be complete and would not make sense without including subsequent periods equally important that brought a revolution in the spread and modernization of many sister institutions in many cities of Albania such as: Tirana, Durres, Shkodra, Korca, Elbasan, Pogradec, Fier, Gjirokastra, Vlora, Saranda, etc. These institutions have served and continue to serve nowadays, having as an objective the education, welfare and social protection of that category of children who for various reasons are deprived of parental presence and availability of their family of origin.

After the first major step in the opening of the first orphanage, this phenomenon continued in almost all cities of Albania. Archival documents prove that despite difficult economic conditions, Albanian people worked very hard and supported the opening of these institutions of deep humanitarian character. This initiative continued in the south of the country as well. "in May 1918 the directors of the Province Administration along with the peasantry of the city, led by the Italian authorities, opened the doors of a shelter in Gjirokastra for orphans of that region and a similar one in Saranda for the orphans there."

For this reason 40.000 liras were made available in order to cover the cost of maintaining the shelter for orphans. As head of the institution was assigned a director and necessary staff was hired to care for orphans, though after a short time the staff began working voluntarily and on no payment basis. Usually these shelters were helped by the peasantry as the state did not provide large budgets for orphans' shelters. This institution was called the Municipal Orphanage and later were brought seven other orphans who lived in military tents in Saranda. Since the cost of keeping two shelters was higher, the orphans were brought in Gjirokastra and the institution was named Provincial Orphanage.

This institution saved from death more than 40 poor orphans providing shelter and food in those terrible days when famine and misfortune effaced off the face of the Earth the helpless. The director of Provincial Orphanage Mr. Ilia Dilo pointed out as follows: "I know that at times when the eyes and mind of the authorities and everybody else are towards political issues, they have drifted away from the social needs. The special conditions of these regions which have suffered so much from the wars, the invasions and the epidemics give a special importance to the issue of orphans and helpless people." Concerning this point, he addresses the central authorities about the allocation of a special fund for maintenance and fulfillment of his humanitarian concern.

When Albania was facing major political problems as a result of constant change of Government Cabinets in 1921, the local authorities in Mirdita were more concerned about the problem of young children in the streets. "In a letter directed to the Ministry of Education by the Head of Dibra immigrants, was requested the accommodation of 10 boys who

had neither parents nor guardians." After the above request, were immediately taken the necessary measures to feed and accommodate them, increasing in this way the number of children that would be under the auspices of this institution. Thus, "the council of ministers in its meeting no. 44 of 12.01.1921 decided to allocate 750 gold francs as a monthly assistance to the shelter for feeding the 24 poor boys. After the opening of the shelter for orphans in Tirana and in Gjirokastra, another one opened its doors in Dibra.

Despite these humanitarian initiatives, it is worth noting that the Albanian state could not meet the requirements for setting up and maintaining these institutions which required a steady income. As mentioned above, most of the shelters for orphans were maintained and operated with incomes provided by citizens or casual benefactors. Of course the local institutions tried to provide modest income for their functioning, but sometimes this resulted difficult if not impossible. "Decision no. 213 6 / IX / 1922, states that the administration of the orphans' shelter has moved under the Albanian Red Cross management since the shelter was not founded by the Government but has mostly been maintained by the people." The adoption of this institution by the Albanian Red Cross was done in favor of children, who would have more efficient care. It is worth to mention the humanist role of this non-profit organization helping children in need at this difficult moment of the existence of the Albanian state, despite the difficult economic conditions of the Albanian society.

Consequently, in the '20s the miserable socio- economic situation would be reflected even in the orphans' shelters. Most buildings lacked the basic conditions for accommodating children, in most cases they also lacked food and heating, whereas in terms of educational and entertaining activities there is no point speaking. The main aim of these institutions was to care for children in need by giving them the opportunity to learn a craft to provide for their future. However, there have been numerous cases when their rights have been trampled. In a report of the Ministry of Internal Affairs directed to the President of the Albanian Red Cross in 1923 was ordered as follows: "those orphaned pupils in that shelter should not be used as servants nor should they work as masters to provide income for the Red Cross".

The year 1924 is also characterized by great instability in the socio-political life of our country and as a result these problems would be reflected in the charitable institutions as well. The main problems arose from the need for continuous funds needed to maintain these institutions thus "keeping a child in the shelter cost about 30 gold francs." Archival documents of this time show that "the government has cut subsidies to shelter children, and is noted that the shelter has received outside assistance and subsidies allocated by municipalities."

Based on the report on the conditions of the orphans' shelter, various problems have been noticed such as: lack of staff (which is reflected in the messy registration of children. This was observed in the inconsistency of the reported number of children (12 children) with their real number (24 children), lack of supervision, which is related to the lack of organization concerning the time of study, work and rest, lack of recreational activities, the conduct of the administration (children were maltreated, hit and shouted at by staff); food was not sufficient and not tasteful, sleeping was uncomfortable; children didn't not learn any skills.

After identifying the problems, the committee found it necessary to propose that shelters are placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and approved a new regulation concerning its functioning. Based on changes made to 69 articles it was well specified the way of organizing the work administratively and the way of operating this institution, which in its essence consisted in creating a more suitable and efficient environment for children growth. This regulation consisted of 3 parts, where the first part pertained to the registration of children and determined the conditions a child that must meet to become part of the institution such as age, loss of at least one of the parents, the necessary documentation etc. The second part included the duties and responsibilities of directors and administration (civil servants and teachers) of that institution. The third and last part dealt with the internal shelter program.

The years to come will be characterized by greater political and economic stability of the Albanian society. Continuous efforts will be made to undertake initiatives of social character, including the reduction of illiteracy.

4. Conclusions

Originally parental rights were resolved according to the Albanian Canons and customary law which gave the right of parenting to the child's father. In cases when he passed away, it was the father's family members who undertook the upbringing and education of children, preserving in this way heritage. After investigating archival documents we found out that Albanian historiography takes for granted the fact that first orphanage, which was called "Strehë Vornore", opened for the first time in 1917.

Although there is still an open debate concerning the history of the creation of the first shelter for orphans in respect to the person who deserves the credit for its opening (the diplomat Rauf Fico or the benefactor Zyber Hallulli', the name of which the institution holds to this day), it results that such efforts have been crucial in creating the first institution

of this kind in Albania. The first institutions that provided care to Albanian children were situated in the following cities: Tirana, Durres, Shkodra, Korca, Elbasan, Pogradec, Fier, Gjirokastra, Vlora, Saranda, etc.

Despite difficult economic conditions, Albanian people made possible the opening of these institutions of deep humanitarian character. But after they opened their doors, funds were needed for the continuation of their existence. Despite the good will of people, the Albanian state could not meet the requirements for setting up and maintaining these institutions which required a steady income. For this reason they moved under the management of the Albanian Red Cross.

The problems that the country was facing as a result of political and economic instability affected shelters as well, which raised problems of different characters such as lack of staff, lack of supervision, lack of recreational activities; inappropriate administration behavior towards children, not enough food, not tasty food, uncomfortable sleeping; no crafts learning etc.

It resulted that the above problems were precisely the reasons that placed orphans' shelter under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

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