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*Performing Nostalgia: Migration Culture and Creativity in  
South Albania* by Eckehard Pistrick (review)

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(Review)

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policing migrants, intrepid journalists becoming illegal migrants). They also expose imperfections in this humanitarian border, inducing further fortification, and, thus, further illegality.

I am often asked why Spain retains control over the troublesome, expensive enclaves. Many answers can be given, but Chapters 5 and 6 suggest that the industry has turned the enclaves into cages for those who think they finally reached Europe. Again, the business of detaining migrants develops around a range of interests, from NGOs (in need of funding), to the Spanish government (sees the migrant camps as proof of its generosity), to journalists and academics (the captive migrant is the perfect subject for research) to the Church (eager to purify its elite image through charity). The rules of detention also turn migrants into guests completely dependent on Spanish hospitality, creating resentment (guests, Pitt-Rivers teaches us, cannot claim belonging or make any demands) that often erupts into protest. This confirms them as ungrateful guests forcing the hands of their hosts, parasites who could/should be incarcerated or deported. The enclaves as geopolitical spaces and hospitality as discourse work in tandem to keep the migrant close, but forever at a distance!

In Chapter 7 we go back to Senegal to follow a group of European activists protesting against the European border-regime. It should not surprise that, failing to locate a valid target, they turned the deportees they wished to defend into living banners for their cause. The book concludes by meditating on the notion of the absurd, while dreaming about the dismantlement of an industry that has squandered resources (in times of recession) to futilely stop people moving in an interconnected world. Tucked away in an appendix is a brilliant methodological essay discussing the problem of how anthropology can study our increasingly globalised field-sites. Taking issue with multi-sited research, he instead proposes the concept of an 'extended field-site', designed to examine a network of relations and flows (*site*) across multiple geographical settings (*locale*).

It is easy to see why this book has won a number of awards. Andersson's main point, that the 'illegal migrant' is produced through the convergence of a gamut of interested actors, refreshingly complicates our existing models that see 'the State' as the main ideological force (un)making the stranger. This allows a more sophisticated treatment of 'racism', which features not as a blatant hostile ideology, but as a series of subtle assumptions that slide into play to solve the industry's contradictions (e.g. identifying

illegal migrants before they become so). We are also afforded a more satisfying view of the border as a diffused regime, forcing us to ask whether we are seeing a new type of colonialism centred on humanitarian discourse.

As Fassin has recently argued, anthropologists looking at humanitarianism have fallen in two camps: those seeking to expose new forms of suffering, and others concerned with how representations of suffering can mobilise political reaction. Andersson bridges this gap not through theory, but with good, thick ethnography. His versatile writing allows him to trace the workings of an economy dealing in the right to alleviate, inflict and represent suffering, without forgetting that this suffering is very real. This he does by capturing, say, the deadly rush of the border crossing, the maddening boredom of detention, or the paranoia that comes from being hunted across Africa. Andersson is reflexively aware that the Illegality Industry also takes its toll on those who profit from it: border guards desperately rescuing drowning travellers, NGOs struggling to control migrants' frustrations, anthropologists drawing the suspicions of the authorities. This monograph shows what the craft of ethnography can do in the hands of a master.

In conclusion, it must be said that this book's strengths are also its weaknesses. Those expecting the lengthy theoretical expositions typical of post-development texts will be disappointed: Andersson only briskly dialogues with other authors. In displacing 'the State', furthermore, the monograph ignores the 'Nations' they govern, which are proving decisive in shaping the 'illegal migrant'. Dismantling the illegality industry, moreover, might be unrealistic given the manifold interests bound to it. Finally, while Andersson does not solve the problem of how to bound the 'extended-research site', his method has nonetheless put him in a position from which to write a monograph of general anthropological interest that speaks about power in a human condition increasingly defined by mobility, interconnectedness and the subtle interplay of reality and fantasy.

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Eckehard Pistrick, 2015. *Performing Nostalgia: Migration Culture and Creativity in South Albania*.

Farnham: Ashgate, xviii + 248 pp. including photos, musical transcriptions, tables, maps, bibliography, index plus DVD. ISBN: 978-1-4724-4953-5 hardback, £Stg. 65.00.

This book explores migration music in post-socialist Albania, a valuable addition indeed to a growing literature on migration studies. It investigates the interrelationship between music (mainly, vocal music) and the spaces in which it is made and transmitted, the emotionality it shapes and expresses, as well as what and how this music means in performance. Pistrick provides new insights into the relationship between migration and sound as well as migration processes and their cultural impact. Throughout the book emotionality becomes central for musical creativity—the pain and longing of migration are transformed into songs that document both individual and collective experiences. Suffering and nostalgia are felt and expressed in music both by the migrants themselves and by those left behind.

The book is divided into nine chapters. Chapter One introduces the reader to a general discussion about migration songs with special attention to such songs being a source of oral history, their repositioning in a transnational and globalised world, as well as their potential to sonically shape and reshape sentiments of ‘home’ and its absence. The author points out that ‘migration songs are highly creative products of human imagination and productive agents for social and geographical space, for a virtual home’ (p. 11). In all this, music of the diaspora transpires both as a tool for integration as well as a means by which boundaries with the surrounding society are established. Towards the end of this chapter, the author puts forth his argument which keeps on resonating throughout the book, that is, the construction of meaning in migration songs occurs in a transnational setting ‘between the spaces of home and host country’ (p. 15). The analysis of migrant song performances plays a central role as it sheds light on the social interactions filled with meanings that transpire in the course of performance. The performance of these songs blends several interrelated processes, ranging from the expression of suffering in sound timbres to the use of such songs as therapy and as expression of individual and public sentiments.

The discussion in Chapter Two focuses on vocal multipart practice in rural Albania, in particular in south Albania, with special attention to performance contexts and practice, geographical distribution, musical structure, and processes of folklorisation.

The author points out that Albanian multipart singing, which builds on a drone (*iso*), most resembles that found in Kostur (Kastoria) of northern Greece and that practised in Bulgaria. Albanian multipart singing is a male-dominated activity attributed a high social value. Nevertheless, since the communist era women have increasingly participated in this singing. Multipart singing is a way in which Albanians comment on the threats and challenges of the outside world and, for Albanian migrants, a means to maintain a link with their homeland. The meaning that this practice takes depends on the context in which it is performed. Traditionally, it was performed around a table in demonstration of a communal bond. Nowadays it is also performed on stage, implying the professionalisation of a traditional practice. During the communist era, the staging of multipart songs was promoted during festivals, with a shift of emphasis from individual creativity to multipart singing as a product of a collective creative process conveying the aspirations and ideals of the masses through processes of homogenisation. Migration (*kurbet*) and its consequent depopulation, as well as social fragmentation, have sometimes made it difficult to find enough singers to ensure acceptable performance. Albanian villages became deserted and are only revitalised for two months or so during summer when migrants return home to live their nostalgia.

The third chapter revolves on the sense of absence in Albanian villages. The author notes that ‘Albania has since the early 1990s become the most deserted country in southeast Europe’ (p. 30). Huge numbers of Albanians have moved to Albanian towns, to nearby Greece and Italy, and to more remote countries like the United States, Australia and Argentina. The deserted Albanian villages are revitalised each year during July and August when migrants return to their village to celebrate their village feast. Feasts provide the right opportunity ‘where emotional configurations and reconfigurations of pain and nostalgia take place’ (p. 43). In this sense the feast becomes an event through which emotions are evoked and transmitted, the ‘foreign land’ and ‘home’ are emotionally discussed and compared, whilst the place of origin attains a more intense significance. During such occasions the migrants observe the transformation both of their village and themselves, seen by the village community as representatives of change as migration conveys modernity. The singing of songs and semi-circular dances during these villages feasts become a means by which

migrants preserve and invigorate their identity through local traditional practices.

Chapter Four provides a concise historical background of the phenomenon of migration in Albania, spanning from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the years after 1991. Actually, this chapter could have been integrated in earlier chapters. Nevertheless, it serves well to a better understanding both of the old and the new repertoire of Albanian migration songs examined in subsequent chapters. The recurring trope in all migration movements, the author remarks, is the 'suffering for a better life' (p. 51). The chapter presents the distinction between 'old' and 'new' *kurbet*, stating that such a distinction may have two broad understandings, these being the migration of Albanians to countries in the Ottoman Empire before 1905/1912 *vis-à-vis* that to Australia and America occurring later, and migration before World War II and that taking place after 1991. Albanian poets and musicians, like historians, have worked towards the same objective, that is, to 'merge the migration of the past with that of the present' (p. 58).

The experience of loss brought by migration and its transference into songs is examined in Chapter Five. This chapter builds nicely and gradually on local concepts to demonstrate how nostalgia is at the same time a consequence of absences and 'a strategy to cope with them' (p. 60). The sentiment of absence is then translated into nostalgia with the former transpiring central both in everyday discourse and in the songs of villagers. Processes of mental and physical displacement generate responses which are then expressed in music-making. Nostalgia (*mall*) and pain (*dhimbje*) become the major sources of inspiration for the songs featured in this and other chapters. Local emotion of pain and longing is expressed in the text of these migration songs as much as in the way these are performed, with vocal techniques that range from the idiomatic use of breath to convey a state of crisis to the employment of the right accents and dynamics. A proficient village singer of migration songs should embrace in his mode of expression both 'his own emotional world' as well as that of 'his co-villagers' (p. 96).

The sixth chapter focuses on village feasts as the main settings in which nostalgia is made public. It is during such performances that nostalgia is made audible and visible through gestures, facial expressions and body movements. In this regard, Pistrick notes that 'performances during such feasts do not only have the individual function of ridding oneself of the heavy burden of longing. They also

have the important collective function of sharing the sufferings of migration' (p. 132). The chapter also discusses how the display and sharing of emotionality through migration songs depends on the context in which these songs are performed, that is, whether they are performed in formal (on stage) or informal (family-based) contexts, for instance, or whether the audience is receptive and willing to interact with the performers. Informal situations, such as the ones during which family members sit round a table, singing, drinking and chatting, are preferred, as these are reinforced by intimate family memories of migration and, therefore, the singing is rooted in authenticity and truth.

In Chapter Seven, the author classifies individual migration experiences into 'mémoire familiale' and 'mythistory'. Whilst the former highlights the autobiographical and genealogical dimensions of migration memory, the latter accentuates 'the coexistence and the mingling of the real and the imaginary' (p. 157). The histories of individual migrants as shared and transmitted within family contexts end up in the public collective history of migration; after all, migration is the outcome of social situations beyond those of the individual. Migration narratives of individuals experiencing the dangers of *kurbet* become a source of reflection on the past as much as on what may happen in the future. The chapter also looks into traditional rituals of departure and return and the role of singing in both. Songs sung during the former include expressions of anger and hatred directed to the place of migration as well as stylised crying pronounced through the use of characteristic syllables. Traditional rituals of return demanded of women to wear a wedding headress to welcome their husbands back from *kurbet* and, therefore, from the heavy work and suffering experienced abroad which left an impact on the physique and psyche of the returning migrant.

The eighth chapter argues that 'migration songs in Albania today are not a repertoire rooted exclusively in the past but an innovative musical practice commenting as much on the worries of the past as about those of the present' (p. 219). The chapter refers to the tragedy of Otranto that took place on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1997 when the Albanian ship *Kateri i Radës* sank in a collision with the Italian naval vessel *Sibilia* in the Strait of Otranto and at least fifty-seven Albanians lost their lives. For the Albanians, this tragedy proved in the most factual way the correlation between migration, death, and symbolic and real absences. Tinges of laments most

associated with death are also heard in migration songs, as migration and death are quite close as confirmed by the Otranto tragedy. The singing of migration songs, including those about the Otranto tragedy, is a means by which the pains and emotional burdens of Albanian migration are sonically constructed and communicated to the world outside, both when performed in their traditional context and through the recordings which are now available online. The last chapter summarises and merges the central argument of the volume with a concluding remark that migration songs and their performances are 'impressive sources for understanding how traditional societies cope with the risk of social dissolution' (p. 224).

Except for occasional unnecessary long-windedness and repetition, the book is a joy to read. Moreover, the accompanying multimedia DVD containing both sound and video examples is excellent; it helps the reader by capturing the intricate and unique characteristics of this singing which no musical transcription can fully do justice to. As such, this book should be valuable to scholars of migration studies, and anyone interested in the intersection between musical creativity and emotionally.

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