

*Die Weite Welt und das Dorf: Albanische Emigration am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts.* Ed. Karl Kaser, Robert Pichler, and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers. Zur Kunde Südosteuropas. Albanologische Studien, vol. 3. Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2002. 296 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. Tables. €45.00. Paper.

Few countries on earth have gone through such extreme fluctuations as Albania in matters of emigration. During the isolationist dictatorship that ruled the country for almost half a century from 1944 to 1990-1991, there was virtually no emigration. A few desperate people put their lives at risk and did manage to get across the heavily guarded border. Most of these suicidal individuals were aware that their extended families would be interned for years, or decades, if their escape became known. The final implosion of the Stalinist dictatorship led to widespread chaos in the country and to a mass departure from Albania by any means possible. In March 1991, 20,000 Albanians clambered aboard heavily rusting merchant vessels and fled by sea to Brindisi and, on 6-8 August of that year, another 12,500 arrived in Bari, much to the distress of the Italian authorities and the local population. At the same time, there was a less spectacular but even more massive exodus of impoverished Albanians to Greece. It is now estimated that over half a million Albanians are living abroad, a substantial figure when one takes into account that the total population of the Republic of Albania is just over three million.

The present volume focuses on the many facets of Albanian emigration, in particular the reasons and motivation for such a mass exodus in the last decade of the twentieth century. The ten papers comprised in this collection of studies by “international” ethnologists and historians (meaning here simply ethnologists and historians from more than one country - in this case Austria, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy and the United States) are divided into two sections. The first section includes papers by “guest authors” on general aspects and on various regions. The second section focuses more specifically on the two mountain villages of Fterra and Çorraj in the Kurvelesh district of southwestern Albania where the “international” ethnologists and historians conducted field research in the summer of 1998.

In the general aspects section, the first paper by Arjan Gjonça regards Albanian birth rates, which together with those of Kosovo, are by far the highest in Europe, as a major contributing factor to emigration. Gjonça estimates that 35 percent of Albanians between the ages of 20 and 45 have left the country since 1989. Nicola Mai of the Centre for Migration Research at the University of Sussex elucidates the role of Italian television in Albanian emigration to Italy. Italian television stations, which were watched secretly by Albanians living on or near the Adriatic coast throughout the 1970s and 1980, constituted the only window on the outside world for the country’s isolated and impoverished population and had an enormous impact on thinking. In his paper, Lars Brügger, an anthropologist from the University of Copenhagen, compiles four case studies of individuals with very different migration experience. Gilles De Rapper, a social anthropologist at the University of Paris X (Nanterre), analyses the implications of emigration in a classic border region, that of Devoll in the southeastern corner of Albania.

The second section of the book begins with Austrian historian Robert Pichler’s investigation of traditional herding practices and the phenomenon of seasonal migration among workers before, during and after the dictatorship. Karl Kaser, professor of history at the University of Graz, provides a detailed description of the two villages of Fterra and Çorraj. Hannes Grandits, specialist in Balkan history and society at the University of Graz, underlines the formidable barriers facing Albanians wishing to emigrate and the factors which determine their decision as to whether to emigrate legally or illegally. Caroline Towers, an American

scholar currently at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London, focuses on changing gender roles as Albania emerges from a traditional patriarchal society. Austrian political analyst Martin Prohazka provides an overview of how Albanians from the isolated Kurvelesh region envisage the outside world (e.g. Greece, Germany, the United States) and, perhaps more importantly, how they see themselves. And Georgia Kretsi of the Free University of Berlin analyzes a contemporary form of Crypto-Christianity, a much-lamented and absurd phenomenon by which Albanians, especially those of Muslim origin, are having to give themselves Greek Orthodox names in order to get a Greek visa and integrate into Greek society.

*Die weite Welt und das Dorf*, which also includes an introduction, a (not entirely reliable) bibliography, an index and an (incomplete) list of contributors, provides an overview of many facets of Albanian migration, the factors which have caused the exodus, and the repercussions emigration has had on Albanian society at home and abroad. Much has been said on the subject and much remains to be said. The most visible phenomena of Albanian emigration: crime, the Albanian mafia and, in particular, the enslavement of over 30,000 Albanian women as prostitutes in Western Europe, are beyond the scope of this volume, as is the long-term effect of the brain drain on the country's development, but anyone wishing to understand the Albanians and wishing to know what they have gone through and where they are going, would do well to read this book.

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