

BOOK REVIEW**Cuttitta, Paolo and Last, Tamara (eds.)
2020. *Border Deaths: Causes, Dynamics
and Consequences of Migration-related
Mortality*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam
University Press. 174 pp**

Saila Heinikoski

Finnish Institute of International Affairs, FI
saila.heinikoski@fiia.fi

Border Deaths: Causes, Dynamics and Consequences of Migration-related Mortality, a volume edited by Paolo Cuttitta and Tamara Last, compiles articles dealing with migration-related mortality from a variety of perspectives. It is an outcome of a conference *Border deaths and migration policies: state and non-state approaches*, organized as part of the research project *Border Policies and Sovereignty*. Human rights and the right to life of irregular migrants at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The book includes eight chapters in addition to an introduction and afterword. Many of the authors have a legal background, and the chapters mainly focus on unveiling the phenomenon of deaths at the borders. The emphasis lays on the southern border of the European Union (EU), but examples from the US-Mexico border are also drawn. Altogether, the volume provides a concise glimpse to the phenomenon, illustrating why this important topic should be researched further.

Keywords: Border; Death; Europe; United States; Migration

Border Deaths: Causes, Dynamics and Consequences of Migration-related Mortality, a volume edited by Paolo Cuttitta and Tamara Last, compiles articles dealing with migration-related mortality from a variety of perspectives. It is an outcome of a conference, *Border deaths and migration policies: State and non-state approaches*, organized as part of the research project *Border Policies and Sovereignty*. Human rights and the right to life of irregular migrants at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. The book includes eight chapters in addition to an introduction and afterword. Many of the authors have a legal background, and the chapters mainly focus on unveiling the phenomenon of deaths at the borders. The emphasis lays on the southern border of the European Union (EU), but examples from the US-Mexico border are also drawn. Altogether, the volume provides a concise glimpse into the phenomenon, illustrating why this important topic should be researched further.

One of the major merits of the book is illustrating the devastating scale of border deaths in the Mediterranean. While there were no border deaths 30 years ago, now several thousand people die in the Mediterranean every year (p. 168). Similarly, the chapters show the link between border policies and increasing deaths: for example, the destroying of smugglers' boats has resulted in smugglers deploying less secure boats that result in even more life-threatening travel across the sea. While deaths in the Mediterranean seem to have become part of everyday news, the contributions show that these deaths have not always existed and there are ways to tackle them. For example, deaths at the border between Poland and Germany have ended since Poland became a member of the EU and of the borderless Schengen Area (p. 156).

In Chapter 1, Paolo Cuttitta, Jana Häberlein and Polly Palister-Wilkins analyse what they call 'the border death regime'. By this, they mean that border deaths occur in complex and contested contexts with multiple and heterogeneous actors. The border death regime also involves diverse policies, practices and discourses as well as aims, motivations and roles that vary between and within different actors (p. 46). Whereas the border may have previously been considered the realm of the state's border control authorities, the Mediterranean deaths have prompted several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private individuals to rescue migrants, and also many national and supranational official operations have been framed as aimed to prevent deaths. Policies in the EU may 'create new opportunities for death', which in turn diversifies the actors who become involved in this border death regime (p. 47).

Kate Dearden, Tamara Last and Craig Spencer examine data related to border deaths in Chapter 2. The chapter also functions as a sort of handbook on how data on border deaths can be collected. It is surprising to hear that news reports are the dominant source of border death data, but this is related to the fact that states do not produce specific statistics on border deaths (p. 55). One would not immediately realise that afflicted persons, such as friends and family, can also be a source of this information. Chapter 2 thus provides valid guidance for anyone who wants to embark on studying the topic.

Kristof Gombeer, Orçun Ulusoy and Marie-Laure Basilien-Gainche, who aim at mapping the causes of border deaths, provide another piece of guidance in Chapter 7. They suggest five dimensions for mapping border deaths: 1) the (violent) effects of borders, 2) how knowledge about the phenomenon is produced and by whom, 3) the different actors involved, 4) the geo-temporal context and 5) the level of analysis of border violence (p. 132). In the first dimension, it is not only the case that people may experience a physical death at the border, but also a missing person may be declared legally dead, and there may also be social deaths, in which a person does not have access to the minimum protection of a society due to the border (p. 133). The different definitions of border deaths are also related to the second dimension, where the approach towards border deaths depends on the background of the person doing the analysis, be it medicine, social sciences or law (p. 134). As also shown by the concept of 'border death regime', it is difficult to determine the role of different actors, such as smugglers, who may be migrants themselves. Equally complicated is the question of the geo-temporal question of borders, because everything that happens from home through transit countries to the other side of the border also affects what happens at the border. Finally, all aspects from the micro level of individual migrants to the macro level of global and systemic forces are relevant when studying border deaths (p. 138).

Border policies are usually examined from the perspective of the receiving state, but *Border Deaths* provides an under-researched perspective, giving a voice to those who can no longer speak for themselves. In a wider perspective, the book can be labelled under works focusing on the humanitarian perspective on migration, which has become more common in recent years. However, not many volumes have been written on the specific topic of border deaths,

which makes it a very welcome contribution. In 2011, a monograph was published on deaths at global frontiers (Weber and Sharon 2011), which already illustrated the increasing death rates in the Mediterranean since the early 1990s. However, the figures before 2010 pale in contemporary comparison. The contributors to the *Human Costs of Border Control* project have also written several other articles and book chapters, and *Border Deaths* succeeds in compiling these diverse perspectives. The project previously published a special issue in the Italian historical journal *InTrasformazione* in 2016, but most of the contributions were in Italian (Cuttitta 2016).

Overall, the book provides an excellent glimpse into the topic but only manages to scratch the surface, unable to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon. The book can be thought of as an introduction and a handbook to studying border deaths. Of course, this makes the book more accessible to any reader, but it seems that the reader is left with more questions than answers. It may also be unavoidable with complicated topics like this; if simple solutions to preventing border deaths existed, they would already be in use.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References

- Cuttitta, P.** (ed.). 2016. Dossier/I Morti del Mediterraneo (special section on border deaths). *InTrasformazione*, 5(1): 32–182.
- Weber, L** and **Pickering, S.** 2011. *Globalization and Borders: Death at the Global Frontier*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230361638_1

How to cite this article: Heinikoski, S. 2021. Cuttitta, Paolo and Last, Tamara (eds.) 2020. *Border Deaths: Causes, Dynamics and Consequences of Migration-related Mortality*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 174 pp. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(1), pp. 95–97. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.349>

Submitted: 19 May 2020

Accepted: 30 September 2020

Published: 22 March 2021

Copyright: © 2021 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.