

BOOK REVIEW**Vicki Squire. 2020. *Europe's Migration Crisis. Border Deaths and Human Dignity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 202 pp.**

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The thought-provoking book, *Europe's Migration Crisis. Border Deaths and Human Dignity* analyses EU practices of governing migration, and how these practices create conditions for the deaths and vulnerabilities of people on the move. The book rejects the idea that the EU faced a real 'migration crisis' in 2015–2016. Instead, it argues that the crisis was a foreseeable and preventable outcome of the EU's own long-standing restrictive practices.

Keywords: European union; Migration; Crisis; Dignity; Solidarity

The European Union (EU) practices of governing migration have received growing amount of criticism after the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015–2016. The main reason has been the prioritisation of internal security and restriction of movement over human rights considerations. Secondly, the EU has increasingly externalised its migration governance (Geddes et al. 2020). As an immediate solution to the 'crisis', several migration governance measures were adopted at the EU and national level to reduce the number of arrivals. The 'crisis politics' (p. 37) has continued ever since, even if the amount of arrivals has decreased considerably. The drive to negotiate common EU level solutions has been lost, and there are many examples of renationalisation of migration governance and especially border control (Brekke & Staver 2018). In September 2020, the European Commission presented its New Pact on Migration and Asylum that promised a 'fresh start on migration' (European Commission 2020). Even if this pact aims to find a balance between responsibility and solidarity, these terms unfortunately refer only to internal EU cooperation and 'burden-sharing'. Responsibility and solidarity towards the people on the move seem to remain of secondary importance at the policy level. However, also new forms of citizens' activism show solidarity for the newcomers.

The thought-provoking book, *Europe's Migration Crisis. Border Deaths and Human Dignity*, analyses EU practices of governing migration and how these practices create conditions for the deaths and vulnerabilities of people on the move. The book rejects the idea that the EU faced a real 'migration crisis' in 2015–2016. Instead, it argues that the crisis was a foreseeable and preventable outcome of the own longstanding restrictive practices of the EU. These practices were enacted through intensification of crisis politics, which led to the racialised dynamics

of power and violence. Hence, the book raises fundamental questions about the justification of the dynamics underpinning EU policy, and more generally, the colonial dynamics embedded in a modern European tradition of humanism. However, it does not provide practical alternative political suggestions for the EU. Instead, it explores actually existing contestations in terms of their potential in contributing to more hopeful and less violent ways forward in migration governance.

The book is divided into two parts, each consisting of three chapters. In the first part, the author, professor of International Politics, Vicki Squire, explores how death and vulnerability were produced in Europe during the migration crisis of 2015–2016. First, she discusses the diverse narratives and practices through which the situation in the Mediterranean was constituted as a crisis. Besides the various framings of the crisis, Squire also questions the politics of crisis more fundamentally. To further the understanding of this process, she shows how the political response to the crisis, especially the four pillars of the 2015 European Agenda on Migration, emphasised and intensified the mechanisms of prevention (Chapter 2). According to Squire, the way that crisis politics lead to monitoring, filtering and channelling migration exposed migrants to various harms without recourse to rights (p. 44). Furthermore, she claims that the EU mechanisms of prevention, rescue and containment lead to dehumanisation and to the normalisation of death and vulnerability. This raises serious questions for the EU migration agenda that was explicitly presented as an attempt to save lives.

In Chapter 3, Squire argues that EU migration governance practices rest on a form of the European tradition of humanitarian government in which appeals to human dignity actually reflect longstanding racialised hierarchies between worthy and unworthy lives. The backgrounds of the people on the move influence the processes of de/humanisation and animalisation, which leave some to die while making others live. The primary targets of dehumanisation processes during the migration crisis were male sub-Saharan Africans and Muslims. The main conclusion of Squire is that the 'Mediterranean migration crisis' can be interpreted as nothing less than a breakdown of the modern European humanism itself and a call for a new alternative form of humanism (p. 101–102).

In the second part of the book, Squire shifts her attention to pro-migration activist interventions that seek to contest EU migration governance practices. These contestations also challenge the 'particular form of humanism' that privileges the lives of some migrants over others. Squire examines three different actually existing alternatives in the Central Mediterranean between Libya and Italy/Malta: the Corridoi Umanitari programme in Italy (Chapter 4), the German-based Sea-Watch initiative (Chapter 5) and the Grave Dressing cemetery activism in Lampedusa (Chapter 6). Her research is based on extensive empirical material: in-depth qualitative interviews with activists and people on the move in these locations. Each of the studied interventions makes appeal to human dignity and practices it differently. The humanitarian corridors program enables safe and dignified travel to Europe rather than dangerous sea routes. The focus is on vulnerable people outside the EU area and welcoming politics in Europe. The Sea-Watch initiative was first founded to raise awareness of the situation of refugees in the central Mediterranean and to put pressure on states to take action to prevent deaths in sea. However, it became a search and rescue operation by necessity, and the intervention was politicised rather quickly. The Sea-Watch intervention invokes dignity in the midst of danger and enacts a politics of witness. The third example, grave dressing in Lampedusa, is particularly important in making the migration and deaths in sea visible. The hyper-visible practice of commemorating the deaths enacts a form of dignity in death and stresses politics of responsibility. Even if all of these interventions include ambiguities and challenges, Squire underlines (p. 198) how these examples contribute to the formation of alternative horizons of solidarity and hope in the Mediterranean migration situation.

The book provides an important (and well-deserved) critique of the EU practices of governing migration. Squire carefully combines various theoretical ideas and previous research to support her claims. With the sophisticated analysis, she also succeeds to convince the reader. However, at the same time the adopted approach can make the book a bit difficult to follow. In my opinion, the book also includes too much repetition, even if this may help to wrap up the argumentation. Overall, the book is a valuable, critical contribution to the literature on migration governance of the EU. I particularly praise the fact that the analysis is based on visits to sites where people on the move experience the real effects of the existing governance. Especially, the extensive fieldwork that was conducted in Italy and Malta in 2015–2018, and more generally, the practice-based approach makes this book worth reading. However, more precise information about the interviews and their use was lacking and should have been added to the book.

Even if the picture Squire draws is rather depressing, the book also provides alternative horizons of hope in the form of different contestations of the current practices of EU governance. It is important to show that not all the Europeans are ready to accept the 'migration crisis' and its political solutions as they nowadays exist. Intervening in 'crisis politics' and giving visibility to reality on the ground are highly important tasks and deserve more attention. Hence, I would recommend the book for scholars and for anyone who is interested in critical contestations of the current situation of EU migration governance.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Tuominen, H. 2021. Vicki Squire. 2020. *Europe's Migration Crisis. Border Deaths and Human Dignity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 202 pp. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(2), pp. 232–234. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.423>

Submitted: 05 January 2021

Accepted: 05 January 2021

Published: 04 June 2021

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