

BOOK REVIEW**Saramo, Samira, Koskinen-Koivisto, Eerika, and Snellman, Hanna (eds.) 2019. *Transnational Death*. Helsinki: The Finnish Literature Society (SKS). 224 pp.**

Linda Haapajarvi

Centre Maurice Halbwachs/Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations and Nationalism, FI
linda.haapajarvi@ehess.fr

Keywords: Burial; Death; Ritual; Transnationalism

News from the Mediterranean Euro-African border have put the spotlight on 'border deaths', a sombre aspect of contemporary migration trends. In uncovering the causes and dynamics of the phenomenon, that is the deep wealth gap between the global North and South and an increased securitisation of the physical boundaries between the two, social scientists have called into question the self-proclaimed status of Western nations as beacons of freedom, democracy and equality (Andersson 2014; Cuttitta & Last 2019). But migrants do not only die *of* migration (Lestage 2019), in the gruesome conditions of the maritime and desert border zones. Much more often, in much larger numbers, they die *in* migration (Lestage 2019), within the borders of Western nation-states, in the banal settings of hospitals and homes, just like native citizens do.

Transnational Death, a collection of articles edited by Samira Saramo, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto and Hanna Snellman, is a welcome reminder of the many lessons to be learned from the analysis of the more mundane, less spectacular realities of death *in* migration that have in recent years been overshadowed by the proliferating literature on border deaths. It is also noteworthy that the book does this across time and space, covering cases from the early twentieth century to the present day, from Los Angeles' Koreatown to arctic Finland. The breadth and the interdisciplinary approach of *Transnational Death* count among its undeniable merits with the perspectives of ethnologists, historians and anthropologists neatly dialoguing with each other.

Saramo's introduction situates the three sections of the volume within the burgeoning field of inquiries into transnational death. Although the individual articles form a rather heterogeneous ensemble, certain transversal themes appear. The different contributions treat the ambivalent nature of transnational funeral practices that in many cases solidify existing community bonds but can also act as a disruptive element. In their unique ways, they all attend to the considerable financial, organisational, relational and emotional costs of ensuring good death in diasporic communities. The set of articles also stands as convincing evidence of the creativeness of transnational migrants, approached from the angle of their capacity to adjust

traditional funerary and commemorative rituals to new geosocial and geopolitical contexts as well as to virtual spaces.

The three articles of the first section 'Families' focus on the responses to the death of individual migrants and transnational families. Snellman's article turns to the 'postmortal imagery of transnational belonging' (p. 25) of Finnish immigrants in Sweden in the 1970s. Snellman's perhaps most enticing finding draws attention to the utmost importance Finnish immigrants accord to customary, Finnish funerary rituals and to the anxiety Swedish customs provoke in them. Not only was cremation more common in Sweden than in Finland in the 1970s, but the immigrants were also worried about the possibility of ensuring the presence of coffin bearers in correct attire, the use of correct artefacts, such as flowers and candles, and the possibility of bidding farewell to the deceased placed in an open casket. The acute importance of these small differences to migrants living between two closely connected Lutheran countries provides valuable insight to contemporary negotiations over burial customs that stitch together people, beliefs and practices separated from each other by much greater distances and differences.

Matyska's article takes the reader to present-day families scattered between Poland and Finland and forges the notion of 'transnational death kin work' (p. 49) to untangle the material and cultural contingencies of transnational living and dying. Her article uncovers a foundational dynamic in transnational families: the ability to ensure kin with a good death despite physical separation. Observing a similar ideal among immigrants settled in Montréal, Josiane Le Gall and Lilyane Rachédi zoom in the emotional wear caused by being unable to attend the funeral of a relative in one's home country. Associated with the experiences of guilt and regret, pain and powerlessness, the migrants struggle to rationalise this hardship as 'the price they pay for their decision to start a new life elsewhere' (p. 79).

The second section, 'Communities', introduces three migrant groups and their ways of negotiating belonging in the face of death. Lourdes Gutiérrez Najera and Ana D. Alonso Ortiz use their case study of Zapotec migrants living in Los Angeles to show how funerary practices are modified in transnational communities and how they function as a site of redefinition of borders of collective belonging. Of particular interest is the demonstration of the effect the urban and capitalistic Los Angeles environment has on the ability of individual Zapotecs to fulfil the ideal of communal reciprocity. Scattered over the vast metropolis and struggling to make a living in the bottom ranks of the labour market, Los Angeles Zapotecs are left with little time and money to invest in the diasporic networks that they yet rely on for dignified death and burial.

Chipamong Chowdhury's article retains its originality from the unique research protocol of the author having observed death related as a participant observant, as a ritual performing monk. Chowdhury underscores how by reactivating their belief that 'life does not terminate with physical death, but it is instead the opening to another life' (p. 113), the Burmese migrants in North America set themselves apart from the Westerners and reaffirm their distinctive Buddhist faith and Theravada cultural values.

Based on fieldwork among Moroccan and Senegalese migrants in Catalonia, Jordi Moreras and Ariadna Solé Arraràs examine the complex procedures that the repatriation of corpses entails, the symbolic reappropriations that the operation implies and the mechanisms of community solidarity it activates. The article suggests that contrary to commonsensical approximations, repatriation is not a response to the difficulties of being buried in Europe in accordance with Islamic requirements. Death and homeland burial should rather be understood as the 'last chance for a migrant to be reconciled with their family history' (p. 119).

The book's last section 'Commemoration' draws attention to the capacity of migrants to create 'deathscapes' (Maddrell & Sidaway 2016), places affected by meanings and practices

related to death, and to dynamic trajectories of such sites in evolving contexts. Katarzyna Herd shows how the commemorative rituals that followed the death of the Croatian goalkeeper of a Swedish football team established connections between the two countries and downplayed markers of national belonging. Cordula Weisskoeppel examines the different uses of the discourse of national martyrdom within the Coptic diaspora. Embedding the bombing of the al-Qiddissin church in Alexandria, Egypt, in the framework of Islamist terrorism, Weisskoeppel uncovers the notion's political uses at the global scale as a discursive tool of 'war against terror' largely surpassing the singular case of the Coptic community itself.

Oula Seitsonen's article takes the reader to the war memorials erected in tribute to Russian soldiers fallen in the battle of Mäntyvaara in 1939 and buried in present-day Finnish Lapland. Far from having been turned into mere mounds in the deep forest, the care of Finnish stewards and the commemorative acts of Russian citizens perpetuate the memory of the foregone as well as contemporary contentions over the place they deserve in the physical and symbolic, even political, 'memorialscape' (p. 178) spanning across the Russo-Finnish boundary.

Finally, Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto focuses on the practices of heritage work in the areas Finland ceded to Soviet Union in the aftermath of World War II, in particular in the small town of Salla. The article attracts attention to the agency of the dead themselves. The unexpected collaboration between Finnish heritage activists and Russian bureaucrats in relocating and commemorating the remains of soldiers fallen on foreign shows that the dead recognises no physical markers of sovereign boundaries. They call their close ones to hollow their memory regardless of national borders and to approach war 'as a universal human experience rather than as a matter of national triumph' (p. 210).

The present collection of case studies of death *in* migration is rich with details and lessons. What insights from analyses of death *by* migration could however add to the picture is their sensibility to the political dimension of transnational death understood as a significant site of collision of 'projects of belonging' (Yuval-Davis 2011) carried out by families and communities but also by the nation-state whose apparitions are scarce in the articles at hand.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Haapajärvi, L. 2021. Saramo, Samira, Koskinen-Koivisto, Eerika, and Snellman, Hanna (eds.) 2019. *Transnational Death*. Helsinki: The Finnish Literature Society (SKS). 224 pp. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 11(3), pp. 368–371. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.444>

Submitted: 11 March 2021 **Accepted:** 15 March 2021 **Published:** 03 September 2021

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