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## Book Review

*Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World's Deadliest Border.* By Maurizio Albahari. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. 272 pages. \$65.00.

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“How many pages would it take to list the names of the 25,500 persons who perished at the borders of the EU? How long would it take to find out those names? To call them aloud? To look everyone in the eye, or to see everyone’s picture?” (203). With these and other stirring questions, Maurizio Albahari starts the last section of his book, *Crimes of Peace: Mediterranean Migrations at the World’s Deadliest Border*. Drawing on his long fieldwork in southern Italy and on his knowledge of Italian and European politics, Albahari manages to interweave brilliantly the tragic and vibrant stories he collected from migrants as they negotiated Italy and Europe’s often contradictory political stances on their existence. As Albahari reminds readers chapter after chapter, since 2000, more than 25,000 migrants have lost their lives attempting to reach Italy and the rest of Europe by ship, most of them dying in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. This figure could be multiplied, because many bodies have been lost and cannot be officially counted. Migrants usually rely on illicit smugglers, while a large group of “bystanders,” such as fishermen and coast guards, take an indifferent attitude and turn their back on sinking ships, arguing that it is not their “responsibility” to rescue people at sea.

Focusing his ethnographic analysis on Italy, a peninsula at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, is an important choice the author makes to explore the overall European stance on migration and the

contradictory politics surrounding it. The Italian case foregrounds conflicting ideologies of humanitarianism and sovereignty, tensions around borders and human migration, and political conflicts on issues of national and EU liberal democracies. Furthermore, Albahari’s attention to Italy sheds light on the anti-immigrant reactions of political parties such as the Lega Nord which have had major influence in creating anti-immigrant sentiment in Italian society more generally in recent years (chapters 1, 2). This is evident in the stories Albahari collected and in the observations he made in the so-called *centri di accoglienza* (“centers for receiving and detaining migrants”) in two different locations: on the small island of Lampedusa, near Sicily, and in the small town of Otranto, in the southern Italian region Apulia. Lampedusa especially is an important site, as it is closer to Tunisia than to Italy and is, thus, a common landing place for migrants traveling by sea. Both of these centers have seen many migrants, and Albahari carefully collected their stories, which he now retells in his book. Chapter 4, for example, recounts the story of a Bulgarian family who traveled throughout Italy for a tourist trip but was detained in Otranto for several weeks on their way home to Bulgaria. The Italian police did not believe their story that they were tourists and treated them if they were undocumented migrants. Through this and other stories, Albahari lets his informants’ voices emerge from every page of his volume, revealing many of the injustices that migrant groups face in these centers. These voices are even clearer thanks to the author’s stylistic choice to use the historical present, where the present tense is used for recounting past events.

While the “border carnage is ongoing” (25; emphasis in original), the book revisits crucial moments of distress and tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea in a diachronic order, starting with the Albanian refugee shipwrecks in the 1990s (chapter 1). In 1997, 15,000 Albanian

refugees arrived in Apulia, aboard unsafe ships. Many more sea catastrophes have happened since, as Albahari recounts in detail, including the tragedies of 2013 and 2014 in which many Eritrean and Syrian migrants lost their lives (chapters 5, 6). Migrants' arrivals on ships also engendered political reactions against them, often based on unstable and conflicting understandings of immigration laws. Albahari describes tragedy after tragedy, shipwreck after shipwreck with historical precision powerfully supported by the vivid stories of migrants who survived the various disasters. These detailed descriptions are key to understanding why and how these "crimes of peace" have been committed. Albahari discloses how fishermen — who in the past saved migrants' lives — now turn their back on sinking ships, fearing that the police could confiscate their boats or remove their fishing rights. Indifference, however, is not the only cause of these "crimes of peace." Albahari also recounts smugglers who put migrants' lives at risk

by overcrowding their ships. Similarly, Italian, Maltese, Libyan, and Egyptian politicians waste valuable time discussing which European country should intervene to rescue ships in distress and how to apply human rights to migrants (chapter 5).

In closing, Albahari's moving book blurs notions of national boundaries by exploring the continuous creation of "morally imbued borders" (24) and shifting ideologies around sovereignty. Readers might wonder who then has the authority to express moral judgment and define regulations on the Mediterranean Sea. Ironically, as Albahari argues, "we are as capable of participating in crimes of peace as of engaging in more just and egalitarian forms of citizenship" (113). Elegantly written, ethnographically and historically rich, Albahari's book poses new questions about national security and "crimes of peace" and should be on the shelves of scholars studying state security, international migration, and human rights.