



BOOK REVIEW

Borders in Globalization Review
Volume 2, Issue 2 (Spring/Summer 2021): 158-159
<https://doi.org/10.18357/bigr22202120208>

Review of Klaus Dodds' *Border Wars*

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Border Wars:
The Conflicts that will Define our Future

By Klaus Dodds

London: Penguin Ebury Press 2021.

Hardback, 304 pages

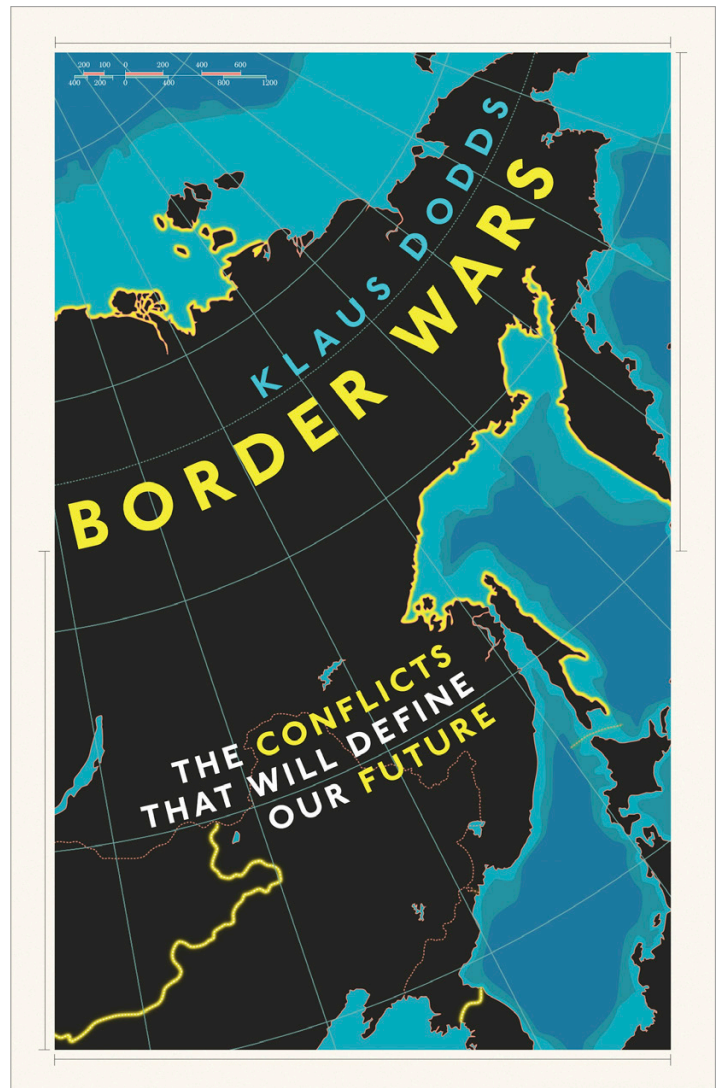
ISBN 9781529102598

Ebook available

<https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/1116981/border-wars/9781529102598.html>

For more than a decade Klaus Dodds, Professor of Geopolitics at Royal Holloway, University of London, has been writing a short column on geopolitical hotspots for *The Geographical Magazine* focusing on contentious places, boundary disputes, regional rivalries and conflicts all around the world. Now he has pulled a decade's worth of thinking and writing about such issues into an easy-to-read volume which is effectively a fascinating compendium of historical but mostly contemporary border controversies.

In a world of border walls, pandemic travel restrictions, Brexit and reassertions of territorial sovereignty in the face of globalization and increasing human migration, this is a very timely survey. A brief introduction is followed by nine substantive chapters. After a discussion of bordering practices in the first chapter which focuses on, among other things, partition and the legacy of ongoing conflict in divided



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spaces, the subsequent chapter deals with mobile borders. Yes, climate change is actually moving borders in places where glaciers are melting, and highlighting the practices of border designation, delimitation and demarcation. This world is a dynamic place and watery borders too, the subject of the next chapter, are moving as rivers and coastlines erode and aggregate material. While maps may have firm lines on them, in reality these designations are complicated on the ground, or crucially, in rivers that move. Some borders are simply vanishing as rising sea levels inundate islands and coastlines and the fate of peoples in island states is discussed here too; societies with disappearing borders require attention as to where they will move too and how their future identities will be defined, or bordered.

Other borders are a matter of "no man's land" because they are not fixed firmly and agreed to by contending states. India, Pakistan and China are still squabbling over the Siachen glacier and where territorial lines should be drawn on what, in practical terms, ought to be an uninhabited space given its altitude and extremely harsh weather conditions. But national pride intrudes on such cartographic oddities all too often and in the process perpetuates conflict over matters that would be much better ignored in a sensible world. Unrecognised borders come next, because such things as claims to portions of Antarctica or the Russian presence in Crimea mean that despite the supposed fixity of the lines on the map that designate national frontiers, they may simply not be recognised as such. This leads logically to a chapter discussing the new technological innovations that are giving us supposedly smart borders. And, yes, there is money to be made supplying states with improvements in surveillance technology which increases the efficiency in facilitating border crossing by authorised travellers, while making matters more difficult for those without approved credentials.

Well before Elon Musk set about acting on his desire to colonize Mars, and in the process revived speculation about space travel, borders in outer space were a matter increasingly being discussed. Renewed moon and Mars exploration has rekindled discussion of issues of sovereignty, law and jurisdiction there too. Finally, and now alas as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, unavoidably Klaus Dodds turns his attention to viral borders and the lessons that attempts to use border controls as a mode of limiting disease spread may

teach us. Here the results are obviously not yet in, but here too matters of sovereignty and national pride are intertwined with both attempts to limit travel as well as supply vaccines. Vaccine nationalism is now a phrase used widely and the question of who gets vaccinated where underlines the key point that borders are very important despite the interconnections in the global economy and the supply chains that cross so many frontiers. We may live in a global economy but these chapters remind us clearly that territorial jurisdictions continue to matter in numerous practical ways despite the rhetoric of interconnections, one world and a supposedly common humanity.

One might question the title of this volume. After all, despite the numerous fascinating vignettes that are the substance of this very easy-to-read global survey of borders and bordering practices, few of them relatively speaking, have in the past or are likely to in the future, involve full-scale war. But that is a quibble; conflicts of lesser scope persist in numerous places, not just the unlikely demarcation disputes about high-altitude glaciers. It is also probably a valid generalization that flows from the cases discussed in this volume that good fences do indeed make good neighbours. Which is why settling disputes on borders remains a key matter for international institutions interested in making a more peaceful world. Borders are not the only cause of conflict but they are in many cases an irritant that, while maybe useful for justifying military and surveillance budgets for nationalist politicians, would be much better dealt with by diplomatic agreement to resolve contentious issues.

The final section of this book provides a guide to key source materials and to further reading for those readers wanting to follow up the themes of each chapter. Given the fascinating details of numerous borders that are presented in this volume, there will undoubtedly be readers who want to do just that. Not least because, in writing about these cases, Klaus Dodds has managed to sneak in numerous theoretical insights about borders, sovereignty, jurisdiction and cartography to whet the appetite for further investigation. As such, although written as a trade book for a popular audience, *Border Wars* might serve very well as an introductory text book for courses in border studies and political geography. It is no easy task to cross these genre boundaries, but this volume manages this with aplomb. Congratulations to Professor Dodds!