# THE NEW POLITICS OF IMMIGRATION AND THE END OF SETTLER SOCIETIES

Over the past decade, a global convergence in migration policies has emerged, and with it a new, mean-spirited politics of immigration. It is now evident that the idea of a settler society, previously an important landmark in understanding migration, is a thing of the past. What are the consequences of this shift for how we imagine immigration? And for how we regulate it?

This book analyzes the dramatic shift away from the settler society paradigm in light of the crisis of asylum, the fear of Islamic fundamentalism, and the demise of multiculturalism. What emerges is a radically original take on the new global politics of immigration that can explain policy paralysis in the face of rising death tolls, failing human rights arguments, and persistent state desires to treat migration as an economic calculus.

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I would not have written this book without the support of the Trudeau Foundation. In June 2012, the Foundation awarded me a Fellowship and with it a challenge. The Fellowship offered me more time than I otherwise would have had to undertake a book-length project. The challenge was to deliver a book that would speak not only to migration scholars and policy makers, but also to the Trudeau community more broadly. I have returned to this idea regularly throughout my work on *The New Politics of Immigration*, and while it is for others to assess whether I have reached this goal, it was undeniably a significant influence on the tenor and the ambitions of the book.

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Catherine Dauvergne
October 2015

# Preface

This book was published at an important time for Western states grappling with immigration matters. More important, even, than I had imagined when I set to work on it in earnest in 2013. But fortuitous timing, from an author's point of view at least, brings unique challenges.

I sent the finalized manuscript off to be copy-edited late in June, 2015. The following week, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees released its 2014 data showing that the number of displaced persons in the world was, in that year, higher than at any time since World War II. Throughout July and August of 2015, the number of people flowing out of Syria and attempting to seek refugee protection in Europe grew astronomically. This surge of need led, predictably, to a rising death toll from clandestine Mediterranean crossings, with the numbers rising rapidly, during some weeks, daily. In the final week of August, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany would stop enforcing the Dublin regulations and instead welcome those who reached Germany and process their refugee claims. At that time, German authorities were estimating that as many as 800,000 asylum seekers would arrive in Germany by the end of 2015. The estimate was revised to a million by mid-September.

The German announcement triggered a series of border openings and closings in the European states that stand between Germany and the Mediterranean shores where most Syrians first set foot in the European Union, or in Europe more broadly. Images of Hungary's new border fence being erected transfixed the Western media. Desperate people were filmed lifting their children over the fencing separating Serbia from Croatia. People continued to die attempting to reach Lampedusa and Lesbos.

And then in the first week of September, someone photographed the body of three-year old Aylan Kurdi lying dead on a Turkish beach. This image had

already acquired iconic status by October 2015. It is an image that seems to have seized the conscience of the Western world.

The question is: To what end?

Finally, the world is watching.

It has been a quarter of a century since the world paid attention like this to refugees. Over that period of time, the attitudes of Western publics and politicians have hardened markedly, and just about every indicator of the situation of refugees around the globe has worsened. Refugee camps have become a permanent feature of the global landscape, conflicts in distant corners of the world have displaced tens of millions, powerful regimes have continued to invent new and horrifying ways to infringe the human rights of their citizens, tens of thousands have lost their lives trying to reach safety. Refugee advocates have railed against all of this – but most often their calls have gone unheeded.

In this current terrible moment, then, there is something precious and unique. Every Western politician is now paying attention to refugees, every policy maker is engaged refugee advocates have an attentive audience for the first time in the adult lives of many now working in the advocacy trenches. It is vital that we use this attention to make some fundamental and lasting change. But are we capable of doing so?

There is an important intersection here with the arc of my analysis in *The New Politics of Immigration*. The events of the past two months fit my narrative, even though I wish that it were not so. Already the image of Aylan Kurdi that people could not stop talking about is fading into iconography, and the children who died making the same crossing this past weekend have gone unnamed in the global press, and did not even make headlines in Canada where I sit today. The way in which the asylum crisis has become perpetual, and the political consequence of this perpetuity, are clearer now than ever.

The challenges that migration, and especially asylum, bring to European cooperation and identity, are writ large in these events. At great political effort an agreement to share the burden of supporting this massive influx of people was reached in mid-September. If this agreement is honoured, it will affect about 10 percent of those who had already arrived by that time. In the new politics, Europe is continuing to lead in defining what immigration means. This is true even though the majority of the world's asylum seekers continue, of course, to be elsewhere. Even the majority of Syrian refugees are in Lebanon and Jordan, places that have rarely reached the front pages of the Western press in the crisis-filled Northern autumn of 2015.

Germany's response to the current wave of people is unprecedented and remarkable. It too reflects strands of the new politics that I have written about

in this book. Commentators have repeatedly asserted that Germany's actions reflect its World War II collective guilt. Such an assertion is not amenable to empirics. Nor is much of the new politics. As I have argued in the conclusion to this book, the new politics of immigration is woven together in an intricate dance of remembering and forgetting the past. It is never solely a calculus of economics or human rights; it speaks instead to something much harder to name.

The stance that Germany has taken up to mid-October 2015 belongs with those glimmers of something new that I attempted to gather up in the final pages of the book. A tiny fragment of optimism that immigration could be reimagined, as a counter to the overwhelmingly negative thrust of the current mean-spirited politics. As in the conclusion, where I attempted to sketch both an optimistic and a pessimistic way forward, pessimism has a stronger hand to play. Just google "European border fence."

As of today, I do not know how this current story will end. But I do know that crises like that facing Europe in October 2015 will multiply in the coming years. Their contours will be oppressively familiar unless we summon, somehow, a new way of imagining immigration. It is to this end that I have written *The New Politics of Immigration*. I would dearly love to imagine that by the time this book is being read, the story it tells will belong to some sort of bad old days when the problems of global migration seemed intractable. I doubt this will be so.

But because there is something nearly unprecedented about this particular point in time, let me dare to go a bit further. Seizing this moment means thinking about game changing strategies at the same time as urgently saving lives. Here are three things the world could do in this moment that would make things different the next time around.

First, change international refugee law to include a requirement for resettlement. Right now, no state is obligated to take in refugees from afar, and few do. An obligation to resettle should be part of the international legal regime.

Second, require that all states party to international refugee law contribute a set and predictable amount to a global refugee support fund. States that host fewer refugees should pay more, those that host more would pay less, those who host the most would receive money from the fund.

Third, strengthen the right to seek asylum by making refugee deterrence mechanisms overseas illegal and eliminating legal barriers (like safe third country provisions) to asylum. All Western liberal democracies (except, just now, Germany) are presently engaged in making it harder and harder to seek asylum. These efforts lead directly to bodies on beaches.

Each of these ideas is so far from current refugee politics that they have become unsayable. Refugee advocates dare not whisper ideas like these, even though we know that the path to real change begin must begin by setting out in a new direction.

This book aims to be a compass in that search.