

go about reviewing them, and from which particular positions of privilege and lived experience.

Athabasca University
Athabasca, Alberta, Canada
meaghanp@athabascau.ca

MEAGHAN M. PEURAMAKI-BROWN

REFUGEES AND ASYLUM

The Death of Asylum: Hidden Geographies of the Enforcement Archipelago. By Alison Mountz. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020. Pp. xxx, 244. Abbreviations. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$112.00 cloth; \$28.00 paper.
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A study of remarkable scope and erudition, Alison Mountz's book is timely—indeed necessary—because the world is facing an enormous humanitarian crisis which she explores in an authoritative but accessible way. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates that currently there are more than 65 million displaced persons in the world (6). And the crisis is steadily worsening. Such huge numbers might be incomprehensible, but Mountz has a knack for bringing the crisis down to earth.

The tragedy of displacement is exacerbated by the Global North's systematic refusal to discharge its legal obligation, established by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to provide asylum to victims driven out by wars, famine, persecution, and other calamities. Mountz simply states that asylum is dying. She posits three forms of death: the physical, the ontological and the political. The first refers to the 40,000 men, women, and children lost while undertaking increasingly perilous journeys necessitated by greater and greater exclusionary strategies. Ontological death results from the “dehumanization and devaluation” (xxii-xxii) of racialized refugees. Political death results from the callous disregard with which Northern citizens dismiss the tragedy.

Historically, refugees claimed asylum at a border—a line—but Northern nations have moved such processing offshore, often to non-sovereign territory. To limit, if not eliminate, the arrival of refugees on national shores, offshore facilities become “carceral spaces” (87). The explanation form Mountz uses to analyze this condition is the archipelago. Thus, islands are the “architectural foundation” (58) of the book. Islands can be physical, like Christmas Island, or functional, the “Gitmos across America” (103), or metaphorical, a detainee's body. The use of island detention has become a global phenomenon.

Proliferating island detention centers are the essential manifestation of the North's offshoring strategy, but offshoring has other forms. Offshoring frequently results in

outsourcing, in the Mediterranean, for example. Originally a transit point, Italy's Lampedusa Island began to experience significant numbers of North African refugees fleeing from regional conflict, 150,000 between 1999 and 2011. With the African Spring, boat arrivals "skyrocket[ed]," overwhelming facilities on the island. Italy's response to the unmanageable influx of the racialized other was the policy *respingimento*, colloquially "pushback." Honoring the imperial past, the Italian navy was deployed in Operation Mare Nostrum, pushing back refugee boats, which resulted in significant losses at sea. Italy has now moved its refugee frontier to North Africa; under a bi-lateral agreement Libya is policing asylum seekers who have Lampedusa as an aspirational destination (14, 46-7, 75-9). Similar outsourcing is underway, as well, at either end of the Mediterranean.

Mountz's principal focus is on Australia, Canada, and the United States, which historically had the best per capita refugee acceptance rates, but which now have the most stringent exclusionary policies (96). In the 1980s, the United States initiated maritime interception of asylum seekers and in the 1990s began detaining refugees at Guantanamo Bay, policies Mountz considers to be "early warning signs of the death of asylum" (42). In the new millennium, Australia intensified its old war on the racialized other, with naval blockades, island incarcerations, and outsourcing. In a particularly brazen though typically Australian initiative, northern parts of the island continent were deemed non-sovereign for arriving refugees (104).

Canada has no lesser "a history of settler colonialism" than Australia (94). So, Mountz's apparent disappointment, if not consternation, with Canadian policy seems a bit precious. She does make a passing reference to the *Komagata Maru*, but Mountz should look to Abella and Troper for brutal proof of the country's longstanding xenophobia. Pierre Trudeau ridiculed Canada's humanitarian reputation as "the helpful fixer." And under Justin Trudeau, the country "in its own quiet way" has enforced exclusionary policies (192). The Immigration and Refugee Board is processing claims, at least from Cuba, Guatemala, and Mexico, in a no less desultory manner than it did six years ago.

Alison Mountz has written an excellent book, and a necessary one, because she dramatizes the greatest humanitarian crisis since World War II. But there are disadvantages to writing the definitive work: readers will expect more and different focuses. This is not to criticize a book that Mountz did not write, but only to point out that she makes passing reference to climate change displacement, which has already begun on a massive scale along the Peruvian coast.

University of Winnipeg
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
rmccormack@uwinnipeg.ca

ROSS MCCORMACK