

EDGES OF EMPIRE

THE POLITICS
OF IMMIGRATION IN
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND,
1980-2020

FRANCIS L. COLLINS
ALAN GAMLEN
NEIL VALLELLY



'Aotearoa New Zealand is a curiously neglected case in migration studies, despite the significance of immigration in the country's social, economic and political development. This book will make a significant contribution towards filling this gap.'

— **Antje Ellermann, Founder and Co-Director, Centre for Migration Studies, University of British Columbia**

'This is an impressive review of international migration policy in Aotearoa New Zealand with particular reference to the forty years between 1981 and 2020. It makes a distinctive contribution by situating much of the discussion in the context of the perspectives and policy interventions of successive Ministers of Immigration since the mid-1970s. As someone with more than fifty years of research experience in the field, I found the narrative that the authors have developed is novel, very comprehensive, well argued and interesting to read.'

— **Richard Bedford, QSO, Emeritus Professor, University of Waikato and AUT**

'*Edges of Empire* is the first book-length study to chronicle the evolution of migration policy governance in Aotearoa New Zealand in the neo-liberal period, against the backdrop of treaty-making involving Māori and complex external relationships with peoples of the Pacific Islands. It boldly responds to the challenge to migration scholars to attend to the colonial in multiple sites and at different scales. The book is also unique in its use of interviews with successive ministers of migration to centre the analysis. In all these ways, Collins, Gamlen and Vallely have produced a highly original and timely scholarly intervention.'

— **Leah F. Vosko, FRSC, Distinguished Research Professor of Political Economy, York University**

'Drawing on the personalised accounts of successive Ministers of Immigration, *Edges of Empire* offers a unique analysis of New Zealand's migration policies. At its core, the book outlines how the politics of markets, multiculturalism, and an enduring imperial agenda has shaped migration over the past forty years. It is also one of those rare accounts that threads the Crown's relationship with tangata whenua in unfolding immigration histories. Collins, Gamlen and Vallely adeptly blend academic thoroughness and storytelling to deliver an immersive and thought-provoking critique of New Zealand's contemporary migration.'

— **Rachel Simon-Kumar, Professor and Co-Director, Centre for Asian and Ethnic Minority Health Research and Evaluation, University of Auckland**

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Introduction

International migration is often a highly politicised issue. Indeed, because international migration involves the movement of people between territories and across borders, it is fundamentally involved in determinations of who is included within nations and communities and under what conditions. Migration is also never far from headline news; some politicians have built their careers on trumpeting pro- or anti-immigration slogans, and migration has important impacts on national society and economy as well as the geopolitical positions of countries. Given this public visibility and governmental importance, it is quite remarkable in a country like Aotearoa New Zealand,¹ which experiences so much migration by international standards, that a relatively open stance towards migration has become such a consistent feature of government policy. This is one of the central concerns in this book, which is based on interviews with former New Zealand Ministers of Immigration between 1981 and 2020 – a period of substantial change in migration policy, patterns, and outcomes within this part of the world.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, immigration policy has become bipartisan – both major political parties largely agree on general principles – and institutionalised, in that there is a significant bureaucratic apparatus maintaining a consistent focus on particular approaches to immigration. There is no doubt that immigration policy has changed enormously in this country over the last two centuries, and especially over the last four decades, and has had a range of profound impacts on New Zealand's society, economy, and place in the world. But the ideological basis for policy and policy change in recent decades has been relatively undisturbed, irrespective of which political party is in government. Oppositional voices to immigration policy have emerged from those outside of this established

¹ In this book we use the term 'New Zealand', and sometimes 'Aotearoa New Zealand'. New Zealand is the official, internationally recognised name for the country and is a referent for the state in the form of the New Zealand Government. Use of the term Aotearoa is becoming increasingly common at the time of writing. In the context of this book, however, we only use 'Aotearoa New Zealand' intermittently since our emphasis is on the contemporary government of immigration in this country that is directed under the authority of the New Zealand Government. Indeed, as the subsequent chapters will show, immigration policy is an area where the redress of colonialism remains underdeveloped.

political order, but they have generally been dismissed unless they hold what are deemed to be common-sense positions.

Meanwhile, the politics of making immigration policy have taken place elsewhere – in the relationships between officials and elected politicians, in the international conference circuits where migration policies are traded and exchanged by professional experts, in the pressure on New Zealand to conform to the protocols of its super-powerful security allies, where there is a constant risk of migration being portrayed as out of control, and in growing questions about how to reconcile New Zealand's past and ongoing dependence on large-scale immigration with the nation-state's founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (hereafter Te Tiriti), and the English-language version, The Treaty of Waitangi (hereafter The Treaty).

Edges of Empire tells the story of immigration policymaking in Aotearoa New Zealand through the narrative accounts of fifteen former Ministers of Immigration and the political, economic, and social contexts within which they worked. Our focus is on the four decades between 1980 and 2020, a period of economic upheaval and social change during neoliberalism, globalisation, and resurgent forms of nationalism and racism. During this time, migration policies in Aotearoa New Zealand have become increasingly economic, securitised, and managerial, with significant implications for nation- and state-building. From a primarily bicultural, Māori, and White settler nation until the 1980s, Aotearoa New Zealand has dramatically diversified ethnically, demographically, and socio-economically – through immigration policies that prioritise economic contributions and permit immigration of all nationalities. In the same period, Aotearoa New Zealand's relationships with states and populations in the Pacific have been reconfigured through restrictive labour migration policies, and immigration from Asia and other parts of the world has been met with racism and anti-immigration sentiment, while emigration of New Zealand citizens to Australia has been a recurrent source of anxiety for the public and politicians.

Placing Ministers of Immigration at the core of this book brings unique insight into the story of immigration policymaking and its implications. Much has been written about the details of immigration policy, the effects it has in migrants' lives, the public discourses about the role of migration, and the shifting demographic, social, economic, and cultural makeup of Aotearoa New Zealand. The ideas, imaginations, and experiences of those who have overseen immigration policymaking, however, have not been the subject of much detailed academic analysis. Centring the accounts of Ministers of Immigration demonstrates how policymaking is made across governments of all stripes, with cross-party

collaboration and consensus being a significant feature, and changes in policy often driven by bureaucratic thinking, emulation, experimentation, and creative responses to unanticipated problems. The consensus on immigration policy often emanates from elsewhere, in the international environment, which penetrates the status quo through the professional discourse that goes on in university economics and social science departments, think-tanks, and consultancies, and calcifies into the standard practice of government agencies.

Rather than distinct political agendas, the story of immigration policymaking in this book highlights how ideas from neoliberal economic thought and the experience of (and pressure from) other nations have been key drivers for the development of many migration settings. Articulations of multiculturalism, neoliberalism, globalisation, securitisation, and managerialism – terms that we introduce in subsequent sections – have incrementally been assembled as part of a twenty-first-century migration regime that has multiple genealogies and is deeply embedded into a range of societal and governmental spheres. Simultaneously, our account highlights how immigration policy has operated as part of the legacy of the country's settler colonial formation, which is arguably expressed in the fact that Māori have never been formally consulted for their views on whether and how immigration policy aligns with Te Tiriti, and in New Zealand's unequal relations with Pacific peoples and nations. We give emphasis to Māori interventions that are relevant to immigration policy at key points throughout this book, although we also note (following Kukutai and Rata 2017) that there has been an obscuration of Māori interests and claims in relation to immigration since the signing of Te Tiriti in 1840 (see also New Zealand Productivity Commission 2022). However, our account is based on interviews with former ministers, whom we did not ask much about matters relating to Māori. Only one of our interviewees clearly identified as Māori, and so our account of Māori perspectives and actions regarding immigration and immigration policy is not extensive. We do not seek to suggest that our own lack of coverage of these issues indicates the absence of Māori voices and contributions in the politics of immigration. We also have our own perspectives on coloniality and the role of Māori in relation to immigration policy, as we explain in the relevant sections of the book.

Edges of Empire is composed of six chapters that explore the transformation of New Zealand migration governance with an emphasis on the last four decades. Each chapter is situated in a particular historical period and in relation to specific former Ministers of Immigration. After providing a *longue durée* account of the 'imperial migration regime' that was crafted in the nineteenth century, we explore the neoliberal revolution

in the 1980s, the assertion of globalisation in the 1990s, new forms of managerialism and securitisation in the early twenty-first century, and the shift from settler immigration towards temporary migration in the years leading up to the Covid-19 border closure in 2020. Across these periods we give precedence to the perspectives and insights of former ministers interviewed in this project, and situate their commentaries in relation to research on migration, policy and public discourse, and selected historical records (although we do not attempt a detailed historiographical approach). Our aim in presenting the book in this way is to document the accounts of these ministers as important figures in the evolution of migration governance in Aotearoa New Zealand, to record key moments in the country's shifting approach to migration, and to examine the diversity of influences on the formulation of policies of regulating migration here. Our hope is that *Edges of Empire* offers value not only from an academic standpoint of better understanding immigration policy development in this part of the world, but also offers an opportunity to represent the first-hand accounts of key government ministers in a way that contributes to public insight and debate around international migration in other parts of the world, many of which continue to look to countries like New Zealand as examples of 'best practice' in migration policymaking. Before we delve into these stories and histories of immigration policymaking, we first introduce Aotearoa New Zealand and its position at the edges of empire, speak to the politics of governing migration, and outline the structure and content of this book.

Edges of Empire

Our account of the stories and histories of migration governance in Aotearoa New Zealand between 1980 and 2020 speaks to this country's position *at the edges of empire*. The first of these was the British Empire, which began to dominate New Zealand in the early nineteenth century. However, by 1973, less than a decade prior to our starting point of 1980, Britain had largely withdrawn from its own empire and entered the European Economic Community (EEC), marking the cumulative closure of New Zealand's political-economic dependence on the imperial metropole. Imperial disintegration had been apparent since the end of World War I and accelerated rapidly after World War II, but in many respects, New Zealand had hung on to the receding edges of the British Empire for as long as it could, cherishing the Empire's political, social, and cultural legitimisation of the settler colonial state and society. Immigration policy was a major part of this story. The New Zealand Government removed permit-free access