

TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITIES FOR DISMANTLING DETENTION: FROM MANUS ISLAND TO THE UK

Behrouz Boochani*, Diana Flores**, Agatha Sibanda**, Victor Mujakachi**, Temboman^o, Fafa^o, Rosie Huzzard**, Lauren Cape-Davenhill**, Ala Sirriyeh**, Hannah Lewis****, Gwyneth Lonergan****, Deirdre Conlon*****, Bruce Bennett**** and Omid Tofighian*****

Behrouz Boochani published No Friend but the Mountains: Writing From Manus Prison in 2018 which went on to win the 2019 Victorian Prize for Literature while he was still incarcerated in Manus Prison. Since its publication the book has attracted a great deal of worldwide attention, particularly from UK academics – it was released in the UK in 2019. Prior to winning Australia's richest literary award his film Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time had its world premiere at the Sydney Film Festival and its international premiere at the BFI London Film Festival. The feature-length film has also been screened at numerous UK universities. In February 2020 Behrouz and translator Omid Tofighian engaged with academics and activists in the UK over a series of events; this article is an edited version of various conversations that emerged from some of these collaborations and critically discusses the global nature of border violence and the colonial ideology and technologies at the heart of immigration detention.

Keywords: Behrouz Boochani, Border Violence, Colonialism, Refugees, Immigration Detention, Manus Island

1. Introduction

This article interweaves critical analysis, responses, questions and answers from a series of UK events featuring Behrouz Boochani (via video link) and Omid Tofighian (while touring the UK). At the beginning of 2020 events were held at various UK universities: Kent, Oxford, Cambridge, Lancaster, Sheffield, Leeds (which was a teach-out due to strike action) and Birkbeck College, University of London (an event was also held at Maynooth in Ireland). This article is an edited version of the conversations that took place at Lancaster, Sheffield and Leeds and involves interlocutors ranging from academics, activists and community advocates, and people with lived experience. This is part of a series of published conversations involving Behrouz Boochani and Omid Tofighian, author and translator, about the book *No Friend but*

* UNSW; Birbeck, University of London, UK

** University Centre of Leeds City College, UK

*** These Walls Must Fall, UK

**** Lancaster University, UK

***** University of Sheffield, UK

***** University of Leeds, UK

***** UNSW; University of Sydney, AU

^o Pseudonym

the Mountains: Writing From Manus Prison (Picador, 2018) and Manus Prison theory. For this article various contributions from the three events have been intertwined to explore many of the central issues raised by the book and Boochani's co-directed film (with Arash Kamali Sarvestani) *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017) and to make connections with the UK immigration detention industry.

2. A multi-vocal conversation about border violence and resistance

2.1 *No Friend but the Mountains and the UK context*

Behrouz:

The same system that held me prisoner for years is identical with the industry that is trying to separate my story from the other stories from detention. People say that my situation and my story is special. But I am not distinct from others, I am a refugee. I am only one of those stories from Manus Island and Nauru – one of hundreds of stories from all over the world. My experience is the same. The place I was is the same place. It is difficult to struggle against a system that has this power to take control of your life. I am becoming part of this market by speaking in universities, cultural institutions and festivals; but I also need to engage with this system if I am to live and survive. I do not have control over the system but I write, make films and other things to resist – it is hard to remain independent. The system has a desire to use you but we should struggle and find new radical ways to resist.

Ala:

I first contacted Behrouz and Omid in 2017/18 when I requested permission to cite Behrouz's poetry in a book that I was writing called the *Politics of Compassion*. Watching from the other side of the world it was through Behrouz's reporting from the inside that I had become aware of the conditions in Manus Prison. Yet the Australian government continued to engage in a politics of denial and when I visited Australia, I found many Australians were/are unaware of or do not acknowledge this evidence of systematic abuse and violence. In my book I explored how this could be possible and why this evidence was not engaged with, did not generate the outrage one might expect and had not prompted the closure of these prisons.

In 'Migration Studies' we have become used to the workshop/panel model in which people seeking asylum offer accounts of their horrific experiences in the asylum system and then academics step into provide the theory and analysis. Behrouz's writings, film, various other creative works and public speaking engagements are a welcome disruption to this model.

Bruce:

I am particularly interested in the filmmaking process for *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* and the kind of resistance it represents. It made me think about whether it can offer a means of distancing from, and mastery over, one's circumstances. It raises many significant points worth discussing in this conversation: Behrouz's co-director, Arash Kamali Sarvestani, has indicated that Behrouz shot the film without being limited by the thought of linear or chronological time. Time is clearly very important for the film, as the title indicates, but we have little sense of time passing, or even of what time period is covered by the film. This raises questions about the temporality of the experience of imprisonment. And although the film is about imprisonment, it is also a film about the natural landscape; the first shot is of a beach framed by palm trees and throughout the film we hear bird song and see animals.

Rosie:

I am a campaign organiser for the These Walls Must Fall campaign to end immigration detention in the UK. A week after speaking at the public meeting involving Behrouz in Sheffield and Leeds I conducted interviews with Victor Mujakachi and Fafa for the purposes of this article. They took place in Sheffield, at the City of Sanctuary building. The Sanctuary is a charity run space that is open four days a week for asylum seekers and refugees and runs many projects, meals, workshops and more. A second interview was carried out at The Art House, Wakefield, near Leeds, with Temboman who has an art studio at The Art House, which is a ‘Studio of Sanctuary’².

Fafa:

There are many people who want to speak out but do not have the opportunity, so when Behrouz speaks it resonates with them. He represents many people who speak about the detention experience. If I can translate what Behrouz represents, in French we say ‘la voix de sans voix’ (literally, *the voice of the voiceless*); I mean a person who speaks out also speaks for many people. He represents many, many people when he conveys his story. So I appreciate when he describes to the public where he has been and what he has gone through. People are detained in different countries: English detention, French detention or exiled to an island... it is all very painful. You never committed a crime and one day they incarcerate you.

Victor:

I also felt a connection with Behrouz and the way he wrote about his experiences in detention. The primary objective for people seeking asylum is to receive protection from the government, but instead they are detained. What I really like about the way Behrouz speaks and writes is that he represents many people whose experiences will never be told, stories that were suppressed in the past. What Behrouz did was to expose the ruthlessness and the insensitivity of a system that detains people who need protection; the system simply wants to manage immigration numbers in order to please the electorate rather than supporting people who are in need of protection. It is really brave of Behrouz to do that and it is something for which I hold great admiration for: his courage, tenacity and bravery reveals things which a large part of the world population does not know about, let alone Australians.

Temboman:

Everything seems to happen for a reason; if Behrouz was not held on Manus Island he would not have written that same book. He managed to create something positive out of that experience. You have to be proud with the little you have. Nothing can stop you from doing great things. Even in detention you can do great things. There are always problems in day to day life and with money but as long as you are able to get up in the morning and meet people and you are still living; you must be proud with the little you have. I can receive residency papers today but it does not mean all my problems will disappear. Work with the little you have, be proud with the little you have.

Hannah:

No Friend but the Mountains is an amazing book – both the resulting product and its manner of production. It is a book of beauty and barbarism, hope and fury, humour and desperation. As Boochani describes: ‘Everything is interconnected: joy, fear, hate, envy, revenge, spite and even kindness’ (p. 137). The craft of writing it alone is astonishing. It is chastening to contemplate the skill of producing a narratively and conceptually coherent and significant text

² Victor was very clear that he wanted his real name to be published. Fafa and Temboman are pseudonyms.

constructed through thousands of WhatsApp messages, written in a second language and translated into a third.

A strength of the book is the refusal to engage in retelling of histories of persecution. Boochani does share some reflections later in the book on his war torn childhood; and speaks of the pain, beauty and resistance of Kurdish diasporic nationalism. But by and large he avoids the playing off of deservingness that is implicit in the retelling of narratives of persecution - themselves the subject of the gaze and manipulation of the state in validating or rejecting experiences of forced migration through refugee determination systems.

2.2 *Literature and film as means to convey transformative narratives*

Behrouz:

I met Arash through the internet after he read one of my articles and contacted me about making a movie. First we had a long conversation and he realized I had a good understanding of cinema even though I was not a filmmaker. I will not discuss the hardship we experienced in making the film due to the lack of technology; instead I will discuss the importance of the film and its focus on colonialism and the situation of the local people on Manus Island. We focus on how the Manusian people are victims under this exile policy. It's not only about the refugees, it's also about the cultural elements characteristic of Manus Island and its Indigenous people, and the history of this island. In this way It is different to *No Friend but the Mountains* because the book focuses on characters and life inside the camp but *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* focuses more on the local people, the Indigenous people, and how they are affected by the imprisonment of refugees there. Through the movie we introduce Manusian culture and the Indigenous people; we open up spaces and raise issues ignored by the media. We explain that they are a central feature of this topic. Unfortunately, the mainstream media never interested in discussing the local people even though they are a main part of this exile policy.

Omid:

During the translation of the book I was also translating journalism, creating subtitles for his co-directed film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017) and translating/editing speeches and social media messages. It took some time before many intellectual communities in Australia, particularly universities, recognized Behrouz's writing and resistance as a new form of knowledge production; a new and unique contribution to the discourse pertaining to Australian border politics. The obstacles and limitations we faced did not discourage us; we believed in what we were doing and were motivated even more with every publication or completion of every project. We realized that through our collaborative work, particularly artistic projects, a new form of theory was emerging – a new way of knowing. This form of knowledge production was connected with ways of being and doing. While working together we discussed many issues pertaining to settler-colonialism in Australia and made connections between the situation on the border and the colonial history of Australia. This conversation resonated with Behrouz's own background since he is a First Nations person from Kurdistan. His identification and critique of the system in the prison is deeply tied to his Kurdish heritage and the different forms of Kurdish resistance that make up his vision of the world and his understanding of politics. Again, the theory emerges out of the lived experience and out of the combination of intellectual and creative work. For instance, the complexities of Behrouz's collaboration with Arash when making the film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* and the conditions under which it was made gave rise to the cinematic vision and introduced novel socio-cultural questions and aesthetic concerns.

Ala:

Aware of privilege I have as an academic with UK citizenship to travel freely and access platforms to speak about my work. Especially since working with young undocumented migrant activists in California I have been trying to open up access to what are often quite closed and exclusionary academic spaces to people who have important and necessary insights and analysis but lack this institutional (and citizenship) privileges. In 2018 I screened Behrouz's film (produced with Arash Kamali Sarvastani) *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* at the Bluecoat (arts gallery and creative hub) in Liverpool as part of the book launch event for *The Politics of Compassion*. In 2019, I organised and hosted a book launch panel with Behrouz and Omid at the British Sociological Association annual conference in Glasgow, bringing them into conversation with UK based scholar activists working on immigration, asylum and race. In 2020 it has been exciting to see those conversations continuing and extending to include more scholars and activists across the UK.

Bruce:

Behrouz, describing your memory of the sea rescue in *No Friend but the Mountains*, you recount that it was 'Just like a scene from a film consisting of a few frames, separated from one another but interconnected'. Do you think that cinema is an effective medium for describing and relaying memory and experience?

Behrouz:

Most people know me due to the book *No Friend but the Mountains* and my journalism but I think the movie *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*, co-directed with Arash Kamali Sarvestani, is very important in my perspective. I consider it the twin of the book. This movie is important because it was the first major project I was involved in that helped draw attention to the Manus Prison system; it reached international film festivals and as a result the media covered it. The film presents many shots from inside the prison camp and at that time releasing the movie made a big impact. But now the film has taken on a new form of historical importance because we recorded a part of Australian history and a part of this exile policy – the prison which incarcerated us for years and years... they have demolished it. They destroyed that place, it does not exist anymore. But now at least we have some shots.

Bruce:

In your resistance manifesto, 'A Letter from Manus Island', you observe that the refugees who remained in the prison after the Australian government closed it and attempted to transfer all the occupants. You say that they resisted 'With a kind of political poetics. With a particular style of poetic resistance.' You also write in *No Friend but the Mountains* of your longing to create while you were held in the prison. What is the importance of creativity, and/or poetry in relation to political resistance? What is the importance of beauty in the face of this carceral regime or in the face of what Omid Tofighian terms the 'border-industrial complex'?

Behrouz:

We used many Kurdish cultural and poetic elements in *Chauka*, especially music. For me, the most important shot in the movie is when I am sitting and facing one of the fences while singing, and there two local kids dancing behind the fences. I think that shot is important. The song that the detainee is singing is quite sad. He is singing on an island far away from Kurdistan, a thousand kilometres away. On the other side there are local kids dancing. For me this scene has many poetic qualities.

Bruce:

Although there is a growing number of film-makers taking advantage of smart phones and cheap digital technology to document refugee and migrant experience, *Chauka, Please Tell us the Time* is stylistically unusual in that it is a relatively slow film with many static shots. It avoids some of the devices that have become stylistic clichés, such as unstable hand-held shots and low-resolution shots of people talking into their phones while journeying across borders or seeking refuge. It is also unusual in so far as it does not resemble a conventional documentary in several respects and as a film scholar I am interested in the creative choices you made with Arash. I understand you were both fans of Abbas Kiarostami's cinema which is characterised by thematic ambiguity, slow pace and minimal drama. I am interested in the way this aesthetic informs your film.

Chauka has an unusual narrative structure in so far as it does not tell a story; we do not learn about the histories of the people in the prison, either about you, your fellow inmates, or the prison staff. We do not even learn most of their names. One of the common criticisms of journalistic representations of refugees is that they are treated as a deindividualised mass, and so therefore films about refugees often take a different humanist strategy by emphasising the individuality of refugees. But compared with the book, which explains the routines and the hierarchies of the prison in some detail - the mechanics and operational principles of what you term the kyriarchal system - very little of this context is provided by the film. It is also about isolation, but it was the result of continual communication, a virtual conversation conducted through WhatsApp – indeed Arash has indicated it is a film archived and made through WhatsApp. Thus, this film, like the book, was a collaborative project. Was that just a practical necessity or does it shape the meaning of the resulting work? Does collaboration have a political as well as practical function?

Omid:

The collaboration in relation to the book might offer some insights into the issues pertaining to the film. It was right at the beginning of 2016 that I first made contact with Behrouz and very quickly we moved from talking about ways of challenging the system and disrupting the material conditions that allow for these particular sites to exist, to producing creative and intellectual work. We maintained a commitment to different forms of political action and ways of challenging the system in terms of the supply chain, the political discourse and pressuring politicians and particular groups with the aim of transforming policy. However, we realized there was always going to be a fundamental gap if the underlying narrative of the border regime was not challenged. This narrative is something that Behrouz identifies in his work as the 'soul of Manus Prison'; he discusses the system that controls the prison as though it were a kind of organism or being. This is something that comes through in the different characters and stories – both in the film and book. In the book he even assigns a name to the system and talks about it as a living, organic, and even conscious being. At one point he explains how the system 'knows' the prisoners in ways that even people in the immigration department cannot understand. His analysis of the system involves a kind of personification of an ideology or underlying narrative. We realized that in order to succeed in disrupting and transforming the material conditions we needed to produce some form of epistemic resistance which involves intellectual work in combination with art.

The collaboration that took place during the translation process for the book and the making of the film was a shared philosophical activity; that is, a community of activists, intellectuals and artists who all came together to help make the book a reality. This growing community contributed to the multidimensional project aimed at challenging, disrupting and dismantling the narrative driving border politics in Australia (the soul of the system) – an approach we felt was necessary.

2.3 *Knowing and empowerment: Framing resistance from the ‘bottom-up’*

Diana:

In relation to the UK context I am well placed to provide insight into strategies for activism and offer some analytical reflections on the situation. I am a Bolivian activist and campaigner here since 2005. I am a refugee. I am a very proud mother of one. I am a law student at University Centre of Leeds City College. I am a business owner – I own a Latin American catering business. I am an activist for women’s migrant’s rights. I work and collaborate with local, national and global charities. I am the Chair of the ‘Health Stream of City of Sanctuary UK’. I am an external representative for ‘White Ribbon Alliance’ (women and maternity). I am part of the Members’ Board of ‘Women’s Health Matters’. I am a Board Member of ‘Abigail’.

When it comes to strategies to challenge the detention industry, I believe in prevention rather than solution. What does this mean? When a new asylum seeker comes in to the city – they are obviously told that detention is a possibility. But 80% of the people never think that they will end up there. I do not know if they are embarrassed. When you are detained you are detained with whatever you have with you at the time. You cannot prepare a backpack. One of the projects of the group Leeds No Borders – which is made up of volunteers – is sign-in support. It is really basic. Just compile a list of names and their sign-in dates. So people receive a text asking if their sign-in was ok – it is a start. When I was detained I could not inform my counsellor until three days later. I did not have an appointment so I did not think to contact her. I could have been deported during that time.

Leeds No Borders is just fantastic. It is all volunteers. Because of that support a lot of people who were detained knew straight away that they could contact a solicitor, roommates and anyone else who could provide support. It is crucial that you tell people what is going on – they actually give up their time and are willing to help.

It is mostly raising awareness within the asylum seeker community that detention is real, it is a very real possibility, and once you are in it the last thing you can think about is what to do or who to tell. I hope you never have to use the ‘emergency response’, but if it reaches that point, it is better to be prepared. You do not get a phone call in the detention centre – it is a very sensitive time. The people supporting you also have lives and jobs. Raising awareness in the community means revealing a harsh reality, but it is important. If you receive a refusal, do not wait until you are detained, go and ask for help – the danger just increases. If you cannot prevent it, at least be ready for it – not only through information and support but also mentally, so you are not shocked and freeze.

Agatha:

I have also been campaigning here in the UK. I campaign in Liverpool for ‘These Walls Must Fall’, a grassroots campaign to challenge immigration detention. I am an asylum seeker going through appeal. I have been in the asylum process for two years now. I campaign against immigration detention because several of my friends have faced detention, and it is something that I fear could happen to me.³

³ Agatha’s contributions in this piece have been adapted from her 2018 blog post for Pluto Press titled *These Walls Must Fall: Fighting immigration detention in Liverpool*.

Lauren:

‘These Walls Must Fall’ is a grassroots campaign against immigration detention. Agatha highlights how immigration detention does not just affect those detained – it casts a shadow of fear across the whole community; she also shows us ways to create spaces for resistance. There are important links between Agatha’s experience of resisting detention in the UK and Behrouz’s Manus Prison theory.

Rosie:

The way that the UK government and other governments frame people who are at risk of detention is as weak and passive. They take power away from you or take your freedom when they lock people up, so when we campaign we talk about power, about being more powerful, taking power, gaining power as an activist or campaigner. For instance, in Palestine, people are living in an occupied territory, and they are staying there, just being there when the Israelis want them to leave. So they have this phrase, ‘existence is resistance’: just my being here is political.

Fafa:

For me, being involved in this campaign makes me proud because I am fighting for something that I need. I cannot give up, I must fight to the end. They cannot push me to do something that will affect my life negatively. Sometimes this type of situation impacts your state of mind and you do something unnecessary. They want to make me look like a bad person or dependent on people for help.

Victor:

One needs emotional, spiritual and mental strength to survive. Being part of this group empowers me because as an undocumented migrant I am at a disadvantage in contrast to British citizens because they have more rights than me. So taking part in these organisations gives me that extra power to air my grievances, to speak out, to resist. I can stand up for what I do believe. I’ve been in this country for seventeen years. As much as the government has tried to disempower me by limiting me to someone without rights, I now see the formation of this organisation as a way towards empowerment. I must not waste the seventeen years that I have stayed in this country.

Temboman:

I have been asked to leave this country voluntarily. I said no, and I have a family here. That is a kind of resistance. I do not get any benefits and I have to report every two weeks. I still believe that I have a place here. Where I am actually standing, that’s my space. That is some kind of resistance. Even to remain where I stand right now. Not only the building, but as long as I remain where I am standing now, that’s my place. I am existing. I call it my place because that is where I stand. You could even be in prison or in detention, but that is you where you stand.

Rosie:

It is often the case that support organisations speak about people who have been in detention and who have been seeking asylum as traumatised. They talk about the pain and the very difficult experiences that people experience before they come to this country, and then we know detention is very traumatic. In this group we know that people have witnessed other people’s suicide and attempted suicide. Those things are all true, but you have just said that there is another framing of people as powerful and strong.

2.4 *Inside vs. outside: The continuity of border violence*

Fafa:

There are times when being in detention and being on the outside are the same. Outside of detention I do not have any support. I am not allowed to work. Life is stopped. People do not know how hard it is to survive – it is painful.

Victor:

He is right; the fact that we resist does not mean we are not affected by the difficulties of living in this country. But we are human beings, and human beings are adaptable. This is how we are able to survive. Theresa May said we need to make life as difficult as possible for people so that they give up; she is also human, but she does not realise that what she is doing to a fellow human being. The moment you try to find ways of restricting my freedom, I will find ways to survive. I am a human being, I am not an animal. If you lock a dog in here and say I do not want this dog to get out, it will starve. A human being will find other means of getting out... because they are a human being. They will break the window, they will break the lock. The methods I use may not be the most elegant. But I am thinking and I know that the person doing this is also a human being. We are surviving simply because we are adaptable human beings. We want our life to be just like any ordinary person.

Fafa:

I remember one day I went to sign at Vulcan House⁴ and the lady there said you do not look like you are suffering. At the time I was living at the night shelter. I laughed in response. She said ‘you are laughing?’ I said: ‘You do not believe me. What do you want me to do? To cry? You think somebody suffering must be dirty’. When I left, I spoke to Robert from ASSIST and he told me: ‘You should tell her that you take a shower in the river before you come to sign’. (*laughing*).

Victor:

Because they think you must be dirty.

Rosie:

So you are resisting that stereotype as well.

Victor:

We are human beings, we have dignity. I look after myself and people trust me. I am able to engage. I am not an animal who is restricted. They once did that to my son. They said: ‘You are working illegally’, because he had a smart phone. This is where the whole thing really surprises me, they do not believe they are dealing with people.

Temboman:

When you are an asylum seeker in detention having a telephone and using WhatsApp is a crime. You are committing a crime. Behrouz did very well in using this technology and now he is world renowned. He did this by ‘breaking those laws’. If he had not done that, we would not know about him today. Why was he in that situation? Obviously, it is the system. But it does not mean the system can stop you from surviving. You break the law and people get to know you very well. What he did was against the rules, having a mobile phone in detention is

⁴ Home Office premises in Sheffield.

not allowed. But we are talking about him now and understand that the situation is about money and power. Manus Island is part of Papua New Guinea and Australia used its money to build the detention centre there.

2.5 *The border-industrial complex*

Rosie:

So there was an exchange between the Australian government and the Papua New Guinea government to use the land. They used their wealth to persuade the PNG government, which is a much poorer country.

Temboman:

When you are poor people can exploit you. If you are rich you have the power to use your wealth to oppress people. If PNG was as wealthy as Australia, I do not think they will accept that. They accepted it because they will gain something out of that agreement. But people are suffering on that same island. Behrouz was one of the people there and now we know about him; he is telling the world about what it is like to seek asylum and the way you can be treated by people in power. He is still alive, he is living even though he does not have papers yet... he is still surviving.

Ala:

The poem by Behrouz that I cited in my book was called '*Trafficked to Nauru and Manus*' (my italics). Migration Studies is full of terms and concepts that are used in the policies and practices that we study. While we critique these to an extent, we also mirror and adopt this language. This is a reflection of the way in which academia also has its place in the immigration and border violence industry. At the time that I read *No Friend*, I was feeling particularly jaded and withdrawn from the refugee research industry (in the context of the 'refugee crisis' and subsequent funding frenzy) and had for a long time been frustrated with the limited engagement with analyses of race and colonialism. Behrouz consciously does not adopt policy language. An 'immigration detention centre' is a prison. People are 'trafficked' or 'kidnapped' by Australia's Border Force, not transported. While I introduce students to the migration policy language so they can navigate this policy area and scholarship, I have now also begun to adopt Behrouz's more direct and accurate terminology as part of an effort to begin to critique and challenge academia's position and complicity in the kyriarchal system described by Behrouz and Omid. As important as (and inseparable from) the content is Behrouz's unique interdisciplinary analysis and writing style, drawing on Kurdish and Iranian literary, poetic and philosophical traditions. This has opened up exciting ways to engage students in the study of migration and asylum using arts-based learning activities and discussions centred on his prose (working with the excellent education social enterprise actREAL). Students have expressed how his writing, and activities based on it, has conveyed the horrors and inhumanity of the imprisonment of migrants and refugees in a way that more 'traditional' or 'mainstream' migration studies research cannot.

2.6 *The role of psychology and of the psychological establishment*

Rosie:

The psychological status of people living in this situation is often discussed in terms of trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and pathology. Many people seeking asylum in the

UK struggle with the symptoms of many mental health issues. However, they also put forward a very different presentation of themselves. Though all three have or are experiencing destitution, homelessness, and have been detained and threatened with deportation before, they speak of strength and resilience first and foremost. Temboman's demeanor is incredibly cheerful and optimistic, and I really felt him pushing back when I asked him questions about the more difficult aspects of being a person in his position.

Both can of course be true, however the labelling and categorisation of people as 'traumatised victims' within psychological narratives is simplistic and fails to recognise the ways in which sheer determination and resistance figures in peoples' identities. Victor's story of the dog vs the human, Fafa talking about fighting to survive, these representations demonstrate feelings of resistance, and refusing to accept the ways in which those with more power want to frame them.

It is a Westernised idea of psychology and mental health which focuses on a diagnostic understanding of people in these situations. Europeans colonised the African countries these men have fled and the Western, individualised understanding of psychology and mental health has also been globalised in an attempt to understand the experiences of those negatively affected by borders, with little regard to alternative framings of responses in the majority world – often echoing the colonial relationship.

The Palestinian example I mentioned gives a different framing – collective action and simply existing builds both resistance, and what we might call 'mental resilience'. Fafa mentioned how it made him and others feel more reassured in their difficulties when he volunteered and supported them. Victor volunteers in several projects, including with Fafa at a local football club. Even though they are banned from working in the UK, they are heavily embedded in the community. Community, existing in a way that is 'unexpected' and defies the negative framing and categorisation given by the UK government, the press, and the psychological establishment. Some of these men have experienced extreme distress and there is no doubt about the level to which borders create extreme harm. However, their resistance to all of it – through being a helpful and valuable participant in the community, through laughing and presenting themselves smartly, through taking part in political action, through simply existing, all seem to have a positive impact on their mental health (perhaps, resilience), as well as create an entirely different identity based in resistance, strength, and power. They are resisting the attempted colonisation of their identities that happens through labelling, categorisation and psychiatrisation by others, through resistance and creation of alternative narratives that are entirely their own. They also made it clear that the example of Behrouz demonstrated all of those things which they see as resistant in themselves, and that had been elevated to an international platform as a 'voix de sans voix'.

Fafa:

I say Behrouz is *la voix de sans voix*. He is someone who has the opportunity to see it and write it. Does the public know how people feel inside detention? I am proud of him. What he is informing the public about what this means, about the place where he was imprisoned and how he and many people like him feel when they are inside and after when they are outside.

Behrouz:

It is very important how Australia sometimes hides itself behind morality. For example, they are torturing people, they exile people, because they want to save people on the ocean. And if we consider Manus and Nauru, we see how IHMS hides itself behind a picture of itself as a medical services company that it is there to help people, but in fact they are a part of this systematic torture. They are the main element of this systematic torture... the nurses, the doctors, the psychologists. And it is possible that some of the people who work for them, like

the psychologists and nurses, are not aware that they are part of the system. They are not aware that they are torturing people. I can give you an example. The psychologist has the duty to provide mental health services to the detainees. But what he or she is doing is acquiring information about people and writing reports to send to immigration. Immigration then uses this information to make plans for how to torture people, to put pressure on people. It is very possible that they are not aware of what they are doing exactly. As I describe in the book, when someone becomes sick, they put him through a bureaucratic system with the aim of torturing him. Imagine that they keep someone in a cage and put some psychologists in there. So the psychologist claims that they are helping these people, but the people remain in the cage. Who made these people sick? Those people who put them in the prison. If I put someone in a prison and also try to help them at the same time it is paradoxical. Definitely, my perspective is that the psychologists, and IHMS in general, are criminals of the worst kind. Even though they are there to provide medical help they are in fact criminals. *All they do is follow the rules*. I describe this in chapter 10 of *No Friend but the Mountains* when the Prophet has been beaten to the ground and a very kind nurse comes to assist. She gives him some tablets, and even caresses him. In my view this is the cruelest act in the book. The Prophet is on the ground, wounded, and she just gives him tablets in an attempt to help him. In fact, she is torturing him. They are a part of the system, the system is just using them.

2.7 *Border violence as a global phenomenon*

Rosie:

Victor, Fafa and Teboman have experienced detention in the UK, and outside of detention they live in a ‘grey area’ of existence in terms of immigration status. As refused asylum seekers, without papers, they refer to themselves as both undocumented migrants and asylum seekers. The categorisation of people seeking refuge in the UK illegalises them, both in law, and in the way they are seen by the rest of the population. Victor makes reference to how the ‘hostile environment’ policies have further entrenched the idea that even those with ‘legitimate claims’ are unwanted, and often referred to as ‘illegal’ by the right-wing press.

Colonialism is a pivotal factor here. Victor, Fafa and Behrouz critique the relationship between Australia and Papua New Guinea, and the UK and Zimbabwe.

Fafa:

When a country experiences colonisation it is inevitable that people will flee and seek protection elsewhere. The colonisers must think about why people run away. They know what has happened in their former colonies. Consider the fact that political leaders from African countries make their population suffer and when they visit the UK the doors are opened like nothing has happened. It is painful to see leaders committing injustices back home and when they come to the UK they are welcomed. If you accept that person you also accept what they are doing to their people. If you are the coloniser you played a role putting that person in power.

I remember a conference where they invited the Congolese president but protesters confronted him and told him to go back home – you are killing your people and you must not come here.

Victor:

I want to confirm what Fafa is saying. African dignitaries and leaders who visit Europe are given the red carpet treatment by their European counterparts who are aware of the atrocities they are committing against their own people. And yet when the citizens of those countries come here to claim asylum and explain that they are being mistreated European governments

do not roll out the red carpet; instead, they are met with scepticism, disbelief, credibility issues... a minefield of issues and potentially detention. This is duplicity when it comes to immigration.

I say duplicity because they are acting purely on business interests and exploiting or manipulating those countries. The citizens of those African countries are suffering. They know the source of that suffering and they are not doing anything to solve the problems.

Colonialism has taken another form. It has taken an economic form of exploitation where Western countries use African leaders who are not interested in development to serve their colonial interests. They know those leaders are just there to extract as much wealth as possible and direct it to Western economies, and they know they are insensitive to the issues facing the majority of their people.

Omid:

You all point out very well how colonialism and the detention industry in the UK affects the lives of people seeking asylum. In the context of Manus Prison, Behrouz also explain how this neo-colonial experiment is employed to continue or further Australia's colonial domination in the Pacific. Behrouz, you show how the Manusian people are being affected by this detention industry and how it compounds the trauma, degradation and humiliation of many decades of colonial rule by Australia in the region.

Behrouz:

This exile policy is having a very negative impact on Australian political culture, on the lives of refugees, on the Manusian people and also other countries in the Pacific. But the negative impacts are also experienced globally. Western countries are now looking at Australia as an example and borrow its model. I know that in Europe there is a huge debate about this. For instance, Denmark has already adopted Australia's approach by sending people to an island. Other countries are considering this, which is very dangerous and now that I am in New Zealand I can see exactly how the political system in Australia is broken and how it impacts New Zealand. Here there is an election coming up in 2020 and many people are scared that the political parties are looking at Australia as an example. They are worried about being influenced by the way Australia is playing politics with their people and manipulating them by creating fake issues just to scare people and establish a fear campaign. There are many examples to refer to: the best example is from last year when an Australian living in Christchurch (NZ) committed a terrible terrorist attack. So I think Australia has produced violence and exported it to Pacific countries. We can interpret this critique in different examples of my work. In general, this exile policy had a very negative impact in the region.

Omid:

Your critical analysis is extremely significant and it was reinforced for me last night at our event in Oxford. There I was talking to one of the academics who attended the event and we discussed how the PNG central government had not consulted the authorities from Manus Province, disrespecting them and creating a whole range of different social, economic and cultural problems as a result of setting up this detention centre. After the original facility was closed smaller prison camps were subsequently built on other parts of the island. It is clear that this industry is about particular elites from different countries making money – stealing money – and other interests. It seems that we cannot separate what is happening in terms of border politics from broader discussions about neoliberal capitalism or bigger debates regarding erasure of Indigenous cultures, languages and histories. This industry is also about stifling the possibilities and opportunities for countries to recover from the fallout of colonialism. So I began thinking about Poruan 'Sam' who is a very important figure in your film. He was one of

the most knowledgeable people on Manus Island and I think the reason you chose him to have a major role in the film was the way that he critically analysed the impact of Australia's involvement in the Pacific, particularly on Manus Island.

Behrouz:

Manusian people are very angry at their politicians and also at the Australian government. All the politicians involved exploited the island and created a fake economy within an already corrupt system – the economic system is completely broken there. People are suffering and everyone there is worried. Now Sam is one of the main characters in the movie *Chauka* – he is an Indigenous man from Manus Island. Unfortunately, he died because of problems with his heart. He died on Manus Island but he would still be alive if there was a decent hospital on the island. So imagine that the security companies and others have made a huge amount of money. The Australian government have spent over 9 billion dollars to maintain their exile policy. And companies such as IHMS (International Health and Medical Services) made a lot of money while Manusian people were suffering right next to them. Sam was one of them. They said they fixed the hospital there but it was a big lie. This is the system, we are talking about a detention industry. These prison systems are there to make money and to justify their projects. And now some of the companies are under investigation such as Paladin and JDA. The main company under investigation is IHMS, but it seems no one really cares. It is a broken system, if it was not broken there would not be any need to investigate all these companies or push the government to explain why they have spent nine billion dollars on this exile policy.

Hannah:

The brutality of offshore detention as a dominating policy and system to attack the right to claim asylum has to be understood as part of Australia's identity as a settler society. (White) Australia has a continuing urgency to stake a claim on 'Terra Nullius'; to perpetuate the legitimacy of settlement in a land home to the oldest continuous culture in the world, yet treated by waves of colonial powers and European settlers as a *tabula rasa*. This created and creates a deep racism that can be identified throughout many aspects of Australian bureaucracy. Behrouz, you note that the G4S personnel controlling Manus Prison come from a life time working in the prison system, thus creating a continuity of mechanisms of control and domination which you highlight by referring to your place of incarceration as 'Manus Prison' and not reproducing the state terminology that attempts to soften the Manus Island facility as a 'Regional Processing Centre'. Even if and when those incarcerated in Manus Prison are released, Australia has refused to entertain their asylum claims being processed within the Australian state system and has enforced resettlement on the island states where they, at great cost, redirect people wishing to claim asylum in Australia who arrive by boat. So Manus Island, and by extension Papua New Guinea, is imagined intentionally as an island prison just as Australia was constructed by British colonialists as a giant, distant prison: out of sight, out of mind. Processing asylum claims, incarceration in Manus Island during processing, and eventual resettlement within Papua New Guinea is intended to be a punitive measure. It is intended to deter future arrivals.

A striking example of the continuities with colonial mechanisms of control appears in your discussion of the use of food and cigarettes for control and submission. Also in colonial Australia, where indigenous populations were not brutally suppressed, they were introduced to sugar and tobacco, used as forms of payment for indentured labour, and their supply used by colonial administrators and 'pioneering' agriculturalists to control and suppress resistance by indigenous workers whose labour they relied on.

Omid:

It is worthwhile focusing on IHMS and how Australia employs certain techniques for presenting a moral veneer; as a settler-colony, Australia positions itself as the moral centre. The use of IHMS is significant here because from the outside it seems that Australia is providing very expensive medical services to the refugees. Some politicians in Australia have said that the medical care in detention centres is adequate. IHMS (a subsidiary of International SOS) have a global reputation which creates opportunities to confuse the situation or create an illusion that enables the industry to avoid accountability. For me, what is important here is the testimonies of people detained in offshore and onshore detention which matches the systematic torture described in Behrouz's work and how one of the main tools for implementing it is IHMS. The doctors, the nurses, various procedures of 'care': these are all described as part of a continuum of systematic torture. It is interesting how IHMS is used as an instrument of torture and also as a cover to avoid accountability, avoid blame.

Hannah:

Behrouz is unrelenting in his exposure of all dimensions of the brutality of the Manus Prison system, and reserves perhaps greatest venom for the nurses sent to offer basic medical care and to administer anti-malarial medication. The roles of humanitarians in propping up the systems of division, control, brutality and dehumanisation within detention and border systems should generate deep questions for academics and researchers about focus and approach in migration studies. In their analysis of spending in the UK 'Global Challenges Research Fund', Sukarieh and Tannock (2019) draw attention to how these funds are created by diverting money from aid budgets to research, including research aimed at reducing migration, and subsumed within UK security priorities. They demonstrate that millions of UK research money has been spent on analysing the containment of Syrian refugees in the Middle East region, while virtually nothing has been spent on 'studying up' to explore the UK government's minimal humanitarian and refugee response.

In Hannah Robert's book *Paved with good intentions* (2016), she offers a historical legal analysis of the settlement of South Eastern Australia, highlighting the role not of the brutal colonial forces that have been well rehearsed; but the roles of the do-gooders in extending violence of colonialism and the genocide of Indigenous Australians, utilising the concept of the 'humanitarian coloniser'. This work is instructive for thinking about how the Australian government, clearly fearful of the testimony of humanitarians allowed into Manus and other offshore facilities, silences eye witness accounts with non-disclosure clauses, gag orders and out of court settlements. This heightens the extraordinary achievement of the resistance represented in Boochani's writings – in many articles, social media commentary, the book, and an ongoing array of published materials across many disciplines and styles, in online and offline publications.

Gwyneth:

No Friend But the Mountains provides a discussion and analysis of a particularly extreme situation, what Agamben (1998) would refer to as a 'state of exception', where the rule of law does not exist. Behrouz and his fellow prisoners are not imprisoned for a crime, nor do they have any recourse to the Australian justice system in making claims to have their civil rights recognised. Manus Prison is a space completely outside the rule of law. Such spaces have become terrifyingly more common in recent years; the decision of EU governments to greatly reduce search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean, knowingly allowing thousands to drown, is such a case. It would be illegal for an EU government to allow legal residents or citizens to die of preventable causes, but migrants attempting to reach Europe via boat are constructed as existing outside of normal health and safety rules.

However, *No Friend but the Mountains* also highlights a paradox underpinning these states of exception – even as Manus Prison exists outside the rule of law, the indignity suffered by the imprisoned is buttressed and justified by constant reference to the need to ‘follow the rules.’ There is an episode, for example, where a prisoner finds out his father is dying and wants to call him to say goodbye. It is not ‘his day’ to use the telephone, but several other prisoners indicate they are willing to ‘trade’ days with him, to give him access to the telephone immediately. And yet the guards refuse, over and over again, repeatedly saying that it would be against the rules to allow this man to use the phone, to say goodbye to his father.

Omid:

It is important to consider the image of the pyramid and its relationship to what Behrouz names the kyriarchal system. The system is not structured as a hierarchy of power relations, it is designed more like a pyramidal system. In this pyramid people can be oppressed and oppressor at the same time. So the employees of IHMS perform acts of violence against the prisoners, but they can also be subject to violence and this is realized particularly when they return to Australia after their experience working in the detention centres. The violence expands and infiltrates Australian society, particularly their families. Refugees in the detention centre also replicate the violence amongst themselves and on themselves – this pyramidal system frames an intersectional form of violence and creates situations where the refugees turn on each other, as well.

Behrouz:

This violence is actually produced by the system. When someone self-harms we can understand the roots of the violence coming from the system and not from that particular person or situation. So the people working in this system and who witness what is happening to the detainees are also victims. For instance, in Manus there was a woman whose role was to work with the most vulnerable detainees. When someone was completely hopeless and very sick, they would put them in isolation. The job of this particular person was called high watch; she had to just sit there and look at the detainee. In the beginning I thought she was a kind person. But after two years, three years, I was thinking how is this person able to come here and work for two weeks at a time with the people who have completely lost hope – people who are completely out of control. She worked there for almost three years. After working there for some time many guards and other employees regret taking the job, they become traumatized and leave. They say they are not going to continue doing this job because they cannot continue – they were traumatized. But this particular person was working there for around three years doing the hardest job there was in Manus. This is cruelty. The answer to the question of how she can continue working in this job is that she justifies her work by stating that she is following the rules. If she does not do this job someone else will come and do it. I think in society today everyone justifies their actions like this. There will always be another person who will do it, so why don't I do it. It is not only Manus, everywhere is the same.

2.8 UK detention industry and responses to No Friend but the Mountains: Pathways for future action

Diana:

When struggling with precarious status what helped me the most was when people did not feel sorry for me, when they would treat me as an equal. When people expressed some interests that were similar to mine it helped me relate to them better, to start off building bridges. When you are away from your country it is natural that you feel like an outsider, especially because

of the language. It conditions the way you feel about yourself. I would hesitate to ask for help because I did not want people to feel sorry for me.

However, once you build a relationship, a trusting relationship with a person or organisation it is the key to asking for help when you need it. Everybody needs help as some point. It is mostly about building a trusting relationship. I was invited to have a coffee or a quick chat during a drop-in rather than go to an office for a meeting. A cup of coffee and a nice laugh goes a long way. That was the most important thing. It is really hard to ask for help – a nice smile makes me feel that people are there for me just to hang out – that people would want to hang out with you because of who you are as a person, not a reference number. This is key when interacting with anyone.

I remember thinking about all the times many of my friends went into detention. When all of my friends were put into detention – it is like a flashback. Before you go into detention it is just a theory. But when somebody you know goes into detention – the most important thing is to make them feel they are not alone, whatever the outcome. Some of my friends have actually been deported. It is about the time they are there. It is that they know that someone fight for that person. Someone knows that they are not in the country anymore. Someone will miss them at the drop in or the weekly women’s group.

Agatha:

Every month I have to go and sign at the Home Office, as do tens of thousands of others who are waiting for the outcome of their asylum or immigration claim. And because I have been refused and am on an appeal, I get panic attacks, anxiety, every month when I go and report. Because at each visit I could be detained. I always have to take a friend with me, and I always have to give a spare key to someone just in case I get detained. It is terrifying because I have never been to prison in my life. I have tried to be a good citizen, or a good resident, everywhere I have been. To follow the law, to abide by all rules. And it really freaks me out to know that I could be going to sign today or tomorrow, and that could be it; I could be detained as though I have done something wrong. I fled my country because I was scared of being jailed. And the thought that I could be put in a jail cell – or a place even worse than jail – scares me.

I feel for those that I know are taken on a daily basis. I feel for the families that are torn apart, because not only does it affect me and the person being detained, it affects the wider family. As a human, knowing that you have a son, or a daughter, or a sister, or a cousin, or a father, uncle, aunt – someone close to you, someone that you love – who is taken away from you and put into detention simply because the system is designed that way – it hurts.

I feel that it is unnecessary for people to be detaining humans, detaining families, detaining a person that is just like you. There is no difference: we have minds, we have goals, we have ambitions, we want to live life, we want to be free, we want to succeed, we want to be successful, we want to be rich, we want to be educated, we want everything that you want. But why am I the one that is supposed to suffer whereas you are the one with the key? Immigration detention should end now.’

Lauren:

Agatha’s powerful contribution highlights that immigration detention casts a shadow of fear across the whole community. Other mechanisms of community-based control, such as the requirement that Agatha reports monthly with the Home Office, represent an extension of the power of the detention centre beyond the physical site of incarceration (Moran, 2015; Gill et al., 2018). A key reason for the Campaign ‘These Walls Must Fall’ starting in 2017 was the recognition that immigration detention, and the fear of detention and deportation, are a key barrier to people with insecure immigration status organising on other issues that affect them. The detention of core members of migrant-led community groups often means the energy of

the group refocuses to try and secure the release of their members, interrupting their other activities. Meanwhile, the fear of detention and potential repercussions from the Home Office deter many people from campaigning altogether. We campaign against detention centres as an end in itself, but also to try and create more space for people with insecure immigration status to campaign on other issues that affect them.

Diana:

In terms of community, I will go for the right mapping of services. There are a lot of services that might exist but people do not know about them. Mapping of services is a key technique to allow people to get the right sort of support. Services do not exist for everything. But you can connect locally. Maybe your own neighbours, your church. Anyone can make a difference when you are in a situation of detention. Just a single call makes the difference.

Another point I could add – instead of working as a community – for making refugees and asylums seekers feel safer, it would be more valuable to actually work ‘with them’, not ‘for them’. We have to realise that the people we are trying to protect probably have more skills than us. Not fight for them, but build their confidence so they can do it for themselves. That way they are part of the community.

Gwyneth:

While Manus Prison is an exceptional space, this dynamic – an obsession with the minutiae of rules while simultaneously disregarding the rule of law – is one that can be found in the more ‘everyday’ spaces of border enforcement in the UK. Asylum-seekers in the UK are governed by a long list of regulations designed to make their lives as difficult as possible, and to which, they are repeatedly told, exceptions cannot be made, regardless of circumstance. The Refugee Council, for example, has documented how women seeking asylum will be required to ‘sign in’ at an immigration reporting centre, even if they are in the late stages of pregnancy, and even if this requires them to walk long distances while heavily pregnant (Feldman, 2013). At the same time, though, the well-documented ‘culture of disbelief’ in the UK asylum system (Independent Asylum Commission, 2008), depends upon Home Office employees willing to ignore the Home Office’s own regulations around adjudicating asylum claims. One migrant support group with which I have previously worked, for example, analysed the responses to claims made by women members which referenced gender-based persecution; almost none of these responses acknowledged the gender-based persecution, even though the Home Office is required to take this into account.

Is this simply hypocrisy? One rule for migrants, and another for the Home Office? In part yes, however, we need to bring more attention and analysis to why and how impunity has become normalised in states’ treatment of migrants, and also to the dynamics of dehumanization of migrants through granular bureaucracy. What is the meaning of this paradoxical obsession with rules within a fundamentally illegitimate system?

Deidre:

I want to acknowledge that presenting an overview of the UK’s detention system ‘in numbers’, in other words presenting data ‘flattens’ experiences, as Omid aptly notes. In contrast, *No Friend but the Mountains* does precisely the opposite. The book provides a starkly poetic, harrowing and powerful account of a complex, cruel system that upends lives. As I lay out some of the data on UK detention, I hope it can provide some local context and insight into the ideology and processes that underpin detention in the UK, Australia, and elsewhere so that we can mark out lines of connection and avenues for solidarity in action and activism to end detention everywhere.

Currently, the UK has a daily detention capacity of 3,500 individuals (detention figures for 2018, see Silverman & Griffiths, 2019). On any given day an average of 2,204 people are held in detention facilities around the country, over the course of one year that amounts to 24,700 people confined on the basis of their immigration status. The UK has the largest detention system in Europe. It is also notable in that the UK it is one of a small number of states where there is no time limit of detention, in other words, a person can be detained indefinitely. While the data indicates that the average period of detention is 28 days, in reality substantial numbers of migrants are detained, released, and re-detained resulting in significant and lengthy periods of time in prison or prison-like conditions. Moreover, the indeterminacy and constant threat of detention mean that detention's impacts far exceed the walls and cages and physical structures of confinement.

Today, the UK has seven detention centres. The closest to Leeds, West Yorkshire is Morton Hall, in Lincolnshire, where up to 392 men are detained. At Manchester airport, less than 50 miles from Leeds, there is also a 'short term holding facility' where up to 35 people can be detained prior to being deported from the country, they can be held there for up to 7 days. The government cost of detaining migrants is £87.71 per day, which amounts to £100 million annually (Silverman & Griffiths, 2019). Importantly, this cost is borne by taxpayers: you and me. However, the government contracts out detention centre operations to private companies including G4S, Geo, Serco, and Mitie. These companies run all but one of the UK's detention facilities. Consequently, through contracts taxpayer funds finance private sector corporations that turn a profit on the back of the uncertainty, insecurity, and misery that indefinite detention brings. Naming these companies connects them to other places where they and other corporations 'service' the global detention regime, building, sustaining, and expanding what Omid describes as the 'border industrial complex'.

It's also worth noting that the UK detention estate has gotten smaller with the closure of four detention centres in recent years. But this cannot be taken as a sign of success in dismantling the detention estate. This downward trend belies the fact that border violence happens elsewhere: in other out-of-the-way places, including makeshift (informal) camps, such as the Jungle in France as well as tightly managed border enforcement programs such as hotspots in Greece and Italy, for instance. In effect, the UK border has been stretched to other lands making entry to the UK ever more improbable for migrants seeking sanctuary. Here, too, individuals who are released from detention are required to report to the Home Office on a routine basis. Today, upwards of 80,000 migrants in the UK report to Home Office locations regularly. The act of reporting always carries a risk of being detained, while failure to do so also places individuals at risk of being detained. In effect, then, reporting ensures that migrants are tethered and surveilled even though they are not confined within a facility.

Agatha:

A lot of my friends have been in detention for different amounts of time – from two months, to seven months, to eleven months, to over two years. You do not know how long you are going to be there, because there is no time limit on detention in the UK – we are the only country in Europe to detain people indefinitely. Your life is in a cage, and you live like you are in prison. But it is worse than a prison because you do not know what you are in there for – you are just waiting to see if you are going to be deported, or released back into the community.

Whether you come to England as a nurse, as a student, as a doctor, as a teacher – as long as you are an immigrant, you are liable to detention. Your life is dependent on a computer or a Home Office official, and you are living each day waiting to see what will happen to you tomorrow, with no future plans, with no goals. Everything seems to die, when I think of detention.

Lauren:

There are many differences between the detention system in the UK and Australia, but also important similarities. In both countries, detention centres are often located in isolated areas which are difficult to access. Whilst Australia has managed to literally deterritorialise some of its detention centres onto islands of Papua New Guinea, in the UK centres are often by airports or ports, tucked away down side roads near freight terminals. The isolation of physical sites and restrictions on camera and phone use are specifically designed to limit information coming out and reduce visibility to the wider community. This in turn shapes strategies of resistance. Behrouz's book 'No Friend but the Mountains' was compiled in an extraordinary way, via WhatsApp messages on a contraband phone whilst Behrouz was detained on Manus Island. Similarly, people detained in the UK have used both solidarity networks and electronic communication platforms to ensure their voices are heard. During the 2018 Yarl's Wood Hunger Strike, people on strike inside the detention centre disseminated their demands and the daily realities of the hunger strike via the 'Detained Voices' website and other web platforms. At a community level, Agatha draws on the knowledge and experiences of friends who have been detained to articulate her own opposition.

Behrouz discusses the risk that attempts to challenge state practices around immigration control and enforcement can perpetuate dynamics of oppression or silencing. Agatha engages with this tension too: 'why am I the one to suffer whereas you are the one with the key?' This works on multiple levels: whilst the guard or politician may hold the key to the detention centre, it is often those with the privilege of secure immigration status, along with other structural power in terms of race and class, who 'hold the key' for migrant campaigners to access platforms, people with power, resources – and indeed, academic journals. Given the reality of these structural and power imbalances, what then should community resistance and real solidarity look like? 'These Walls Must Fall' attempts to engage with these questions, however imperfectly. We believe that people who are not at risk of detention need to stand alongside those directly affected to push for change, using their power and privilege where necessary. Solidarity is about doing things 'with' people, rather than 'for' people. People like Agatha and Behrouz, at the sharp end of state practices of categorisation and illegalisation, have vital contributions to make – and solidarity requires ensuring that they are heard.

3. Concluding remarks

Behrouz's book, film and other creative and intellectual work has generated many new projects and networks in Australia and beyond. Similar to the development of Manus Prison theory, recent transnational initiatives have emerged organically through collaboration, consultation and sharing. Within this frame, the actors involved in these shared philosophical activities do not make a distinction between creative work, intellectual and theoretical work, political activism and the role of cultural heritage. Through these kinds of multifaceted and multi-vocal engagement we can begin to see how theory or intellectual vision emerges out of art and community, and how lived experiences are valued and communicated when political action manifests a kind of radical openness.

Manus Prison theory relates to Behrouz's film, journalism and other intellectual and creative works. It is a coherent theoretical and artistic project and vision that breaks down the sharp distinction between what Behrouz does creatively, intellectually and in terms of his political activism. One important aspect of Manus Prison theory is the debordering work it aims to achieve. Theoretical work is introduced as embodied knowledge and deeply ingrained in different historical movements and struggles – something that is transgenerational and, as reflected in this article, aims to be transnational.

References

- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Boochani, B. (2017). A letter from Manus. *The Saturday Paper*, 9-15 December. Retrieved from: <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2017/12/09/lettermanusland/15127380005617>
- Boochani, B. (2018). *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus prison*. Sydney, Australia: Picador.
- Boochani, B. (Director), & Kamali Sarvestani, A. (Producer/Director). (2017). *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* [Motion Picture]. Netherlands: Sarvin Productions.
- Conlon, D. (2017) Immigration policy and migrant support organizations in an era of austerity and hope. In D. Brotherton & P. Kretsedemas (Eds.). *Immigration policy in the age of punishment: Detention, deportation and border control*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Feldman, R. (2013). *When maternity doesn't matter: Dispersing pregnant women seeking asylum*. London, UK: Refugee Council.
- Gill, N., Conlon, D., Moran, D., & Burridge, A. (2018). Carceral circuitry: New directions in carceral geography. *Progress in Human Geography*, 42(2), 183-204. doi:10.1177/0309132516671823
- Independent Asylum Commission. (2008). *Fit for purpose yet? The Independent Asylum Commission's Interim findings*. Retrieved from: <http://www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk/files/Fit%20for%20Purpose%20Yet.pdf>
- Moran, D. (2015). *Carceral geography: Spaces and practices of incarceration*. Birmingham, UK: Ashgate.
- Roberts, H. (2016). *Paved with good intentions: Terra nullius, Aboriginal land rights and settler-colonial law*. Australia, Sydney: Halstead Press.
- Sibanda, A. (2018). *These Walls Must Fall: Fighting immigration detention in Liverpool*. London, UK: Pluto Press. Retrieved from: <https://www.plutobooks.com/blog/these-walls-must-fall-fighting-immigration-detention/>
- Silverman, S.J., & Griffiths, M.E.B. (2019). *Immigration detention in the UK*. Migration Observatory, COMPAS, University of Oxford, UK.
- Sirriyeh, A. (2018). *The politics of compassion: Immigration and asylum policy*. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press.
- Sukarieh, M., & Tannock, S. (2019). Subcontracting academia: Alienation, exploitation and disillusionment in the UK overseas Syrian refugee research industry. *Antipode*, 51, 664-680. doi:10.1111/anti.12502