

Prizing Non-Citizenship Literature: Behrouz Boochani's "No Friend But The Mountains" and the Economy of Literary Nationalism

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Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish-Iranian asylum seeker and writer, spent six years of his life on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea) held in an Australian detention centre against his will, as were many others. Boochani's memoir *No Friend But The Mountains*, typed out on a cell phone on Manus directly following the closure of the prison in 2017, received global media attention when published in 2018 (transl. Omid Tofighian). Boochani's text illuminates the necropolitical system that was employed against refugees on Manus. It has triggered widespread scholarly and public debate on offshore detention centres and asylum policies, even inspiring new fields of research such as "Manus Prison Theory" (e.g. Tofighian, 2020). Further Boochani, who never obtained Australian citizenship, received numerous literary prizes, including the prestigious Victorian Prize for Literature that normally is awarded exclusively to Australian nationals.

This paper is dedicated to the nexus of citizenship, literary prizes, literary nationalism, and the attention economy, focusing on the apparent transubstantiability of 'national culture' into different forms of 'access,' including access to media attention and 'cultural citizenship.' Gender also plays a role here, given the imbalance of attention that mostly has been allocated to Manus where single adult male refugees were detained, considerably more so than to the system on Nauru, where families, women and unaccompanied minors were forcibly relocated. As both the attention economy and the book industry have geared up to represent the abusive conditions experienced by refugees on Manus, it seems that the genderedness of experiencing detention –and, we might add, of representation –has tended to be an afterthought.

Speaker Bio:

PD Dr Caroline Koegler is Senior Lecturer of British Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Münster, Germany. Her research specializes in colonial and postcolonial studies, gender and queer studies, economic criticism, and long eighteenth-century literature, having appeared in journals such as *Interventions*, *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, *NOVEL*, *A Forum on Fiction*, and *Women's Writing*. Caroline is co-author of *Are Books still 'Different'? Literature as Culture and Commodity in a Digital Age* (f/c with Cambridge University Press), author of *Critical Branding. Postcolonial Studies and the Market* (Routledge 2018), and co-editor of *Writing Brexit. Colonial Remains* (Routledge 2021) as well as *Locating African European Studies: Interventions-Intersections-Conversations* (Routledge 2020). Together with Corinna Norrick-Rühl and Petra Pohlmann, she is PI of "Literature and the Market", a subproject of Münster's Collaborative Research Center "Law and Literature".

Hauptautor: KOEGLER, Caroline

Vortragende(r): KOEGLER, Caroline