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Writing Border Violence in Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends* and Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree
of Master in Comparative Literature

University of Geneva

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“Vuelan fronteras de un país
cuyo falso centro está en nosotros
que quién sabe dónde estemos.
El norte está en el sur,
este y oeste se confunden,
el sur se pierde entre la bruma
y dentro lo más vivo es la memoria.”

“La mentira”, Ida Vitale

“Frontiers are indeed the razor’s edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war and peace, of life or death to nations. Just as the protection of the home is the most vital care of the private citizen, so the integrity of her borders is the condition of existence of the State.”

“Frontiers”, Lord Curzon of Kedleston, 1907

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Part One: The Five Ws

Who, what, when, where, and why. The five Ws are questions whose answers are considered essential in journalistic report writing. Wrongly attributed to Hermagoras, they were first named by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*[1]*.* Most often, the five Ws are followed by "and one H" (How). The first part of this *mémoire* is devoted to exploring the five Ws of Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* (Coffee House Press, 2017) and Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* (Picador, 2018), while the second will explore the 'How'.

I consider these two texts of contemporary migration narrative as great pieces of journalism which deserve a place of honour and recognition in academia. The order of the questions has been modified for reasons of clarity and coherence.

Who?

On 3 April 2021, Facebook user Anjel Hernandez posted, on behalf of a Border Patrol friend, a camera phone video of a desperate child walking alone at the side of a solitary road, in the midst of the Texan desert, close to the US-Mexican border in Río Grande City. Hernandez detailed in the post, "[c]hild woke up alone after being left by the group (184 of them) he had been traveling with" (Hernandez). The fact was corroborated by the child who in the video says in Spanish: "I was walking with a group and then they left me alone and I don't know where they are"[2] (Hernandez, 0:36). In our like-and-share era, the crying child did not go unnoticed: 18,000 users shared Anjel Hernandez's post, which shortly went viral, becoming the first symbol and evidence of the monumental migration challenge the Biden administration is facing.

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[1] See Michael C. Sloan, "Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as the Original Locus for the Septem Circumstantiae", *Classical Philology*, nº105, 2010, pp. 236–251.

[2] "Yo venía con un grupo y me dejaron botado y no sé dónde están" (Hernández, 00:36). Translation is mine; unless otherwise specified, all translations from Spanish and French into English are mine.

But as the child said, “I was not alone”. 170,000 undocumented migrants, most of them originally from Central America, were apprehended at the US southwest border in March of this year only, 18,700 of whom were unaccompanied children[3]. The numbers are daunting. As UNICEF reported on 19 April, over the last weeks an average of 275 new child migrants have been detected *daily* trying to cross the US border by Mexican authorities, and many more are expected to arrive in the coming months (UNICEF) – not to mention, of course, those crossing undetected. With the border jail-like detention facilities where children are first held, and the more permanent shelter sites getting more and more overcrowded, the treacherous situation has already been considered by many as a ‘children migration crisis’; a term that brings back memories of 2014 when an estimated number of 102,000 unaccompanied children set foot on US ground[4].

Sadly, cases of border violence are numerous across the world, but a certain parallel can be drawn between the video of the crying child and the release of 50 men imprisoned at the Kangaroo Point immigration centre in Brisbane, Australia, in mid-April 2021. The two cases are the result of draconian immigration policies seeking to exclude and restrict potential asylum seekers from access to rich countries. If I write ‘potential’ it is only because many of these migrants had not even reached the promised land at the time of their detention. Border violence, rephrased by some as ‘national security’[5], often takes place well before the border itself, namely in Mexico, the Indian Ocean, or the region of Sahel, located hundreds of kilometers south of Europe.

The atrocious story of the 50 imprisoned men can be summarized as follows. Fleeing from persecution, hunger, and despair in their countries of origin, these men boarded a precarious vessel from somewhere in Indonesia, aiming to reach Australia. Most probably, they were thinking about Christmas Island, the Australian territory in the Indian Ocean, lying south of Java City. After their perilous, life-threatening odyssey, they found themselves imprisoned in the Christmas Island Detention Centre under the so-called ‘19th of July Law’, only to be transferred one month later, for an indefinite period, to either the remote country of Nauru, 6,851km from Christmas Island, or to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, 4,700km from Christmas Island[6].

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[3] Source: *The New York Times* (Kanno-Youngs).

[4] Source: Sarah Pierce, “Unaccompanied Child Migrants in U.S. Communities, Immigration Courts, and Schools”, *Migration Policy Institute*, October 2015, page 1. Note on terminology: in 2021, most of the media and policy researchers employ the term ‘migration’ instead of ‘immigration’, the latter being still common in 2014. In her essay, Luiselli refers to the ‘children *im*migration crisis’.

[5] Former US President Donald Trump notes on the website of his administration, 45office.org: “Understanding that *border security is national security*, President Trump achieved the most secure border in United States history and signed a series of historic agreements with our partners in the Western Hemisphere to stop smuggling, trafficking, and illegal migration” (45office, italics are mine).

[6] A more detailed explanation of this policy and its historical context will be given in section ‘Why?’ of ‘Part One’.

These two islands, along with Port Moresby, also in PNG[7], held the Australian offshore processing facilities between 2013 and 2019[8]. During that period, hundreds of migrants seeking asylum, but undocumented at the time of landing in the country, were imprisoned without trial in appallingly insanitary conditions. Australia's offshore detention regime has been labelled by Michael Grewcock, Senior Lecturer of Criminal Law in the Faculty at UNSW, Sydney, as "a barrier every bit as impenetrable as Donald Trump's proposed wall along the US-Mexico border" (Grewcock, 72).

Years passed on Manus Island and Nauru, and the detainees' health significantly worsened, to the point that in the 2014-2018 period, 11 people lost their lives: seven on Manus Island, four on Nauru and one on Christmas Island[9]. Dr Nina Zimmerman, a forensic psychiatrist who was commissioned by the UNHCR to visit Nauru in 2016, stated that 81% of prisoners suffered from severe depression and/or post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)[10].

Given the barrage of criticism against the harshness of the Australian migration policies[11], in December 2018 the Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, passed the so-called 'Medevac Law', which allowed the transfer of detainees in offshore facilities to mainland Australia to receive medical treatment. But what was not explicitly stated in the 'Medevac Law' is that detainees would be confined to hotel rooms with views of crowded streets where people could walk carefree and seemingly full of joy. Observing freedom but not having access to it also became a form of torture. "For over a year, I wasn't allowed to take one step outside of my room. I wasn't allowed fresh air, sunlight, to study, to exercise or even to go for a walk. We didn't have any basic human rights," prisoner Ahmad recently said in a statement to *Al Jazeera* (Silva).

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[7] Hereafter I will use the abbreviation PNG for Papua New Guinea.

[8] The two detention centres in PNG were closed in 2017 "following the PNG Supreme Court decision that the existence of the camp breached the PNG Constitution", as stated by Maria, Giannacopoulos and Claire Loughnan. For further information, see Maria Giannacopoulos & Claire Loughnan "'Closure' at Manus Island and carceral expansion in the open air prison", *Globalizations*, nº17:7, 2020, pp. 1118–1135.

[9] Source: Omid Tofighian, "Translator's Tale: A Window to the Mountains", in *No Friend but the Mountains*, London: Picador, 2018, p. 376.

[10] From an interview to Dr Nina Zimmerman in Ben Robinson Drawbridge, « Australian atrocity exposed in Nauru", *RNZ*, https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/programmes/datelinepacific/audio/201819892/australian-atrocity-exposed-on-nauru, 14 October 2016.

[11] Among the many critics, noteworthy is the statement by Phakiso Mochochoko, Director Jurisdiction, Complementarity and Cooperation Division, International Criminal Court, on 12 February 2020: "crimes against humanity may have been committed by the Australian government against migrants or asylum seekers arriving by boat who were interdicted at sea (either in Australia's territorial waters or international waters), transferred to offshore processing centres in Nauru and Manus Island, and detained there for prolonged periods under inhuman conditions from 2001 to the present day (…) These conditions of detention appear to have constituted cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment ("CIDT"), and the gravity of the alleged conduct thus appears to have been such that it was in violation of fundamental rules of international law" (Mochochoko, 1).

Although these 50 men have finally been released into the community and granted a final departure bridging visa in Australia – a temporary visa – while they wait for a final decision, hundreds of migrants are still wandering through the limbo of Nauru, Papua New Guinea, or Christmas Island hoping to reach Australia mainland one day[12].

These two cases of border violence were experienced first-hand and investigated thoroughly by writers and academics Valeria Luiselli and Behrouz Boochani in *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017) and *No Friend but the Mountain*s (2018) respectively. Although in different ways and from very different perspectives, the two authors are both committed to being a voice for the voiceless.

Luiselli, a Mexican resident of New York since beginning her studies in Comparative Literature at Columbia University, was struggling to obtain a Green Card – the US Permanent Resident Card – when she began working as a volunteer interpreter for undocumented children in the Federal Immigration Court, months after the declaration by the Obama administration of the June 2014 children's crisis. Back then, hundreds of children were in desperate need of an attorney, and an interpreter to translate from Spanish to English, to fight their cases in the already overburdened US immigration court system. In *Tell Me How It Ends*, Luiselli explores the roots that triggered the crisis, drawing on her experience as a volunteer interpreter in an immigration court, and her critical reading skills achieved throughout her years in Columbia.

Born in Mexico City in 1983, but having grown up in South Korea, South Africa and India, Luiselli has always been wandering between various colonial cultures and travelling from English to Spanish and back again – she attended international private schools taught in English. The in-between space of living in two languages, which are also two ways of seeing and being in the world, was the object of her PhD thesis 'Translating Spaces. Mexico City in the International Modernist Circuit', and, as we will see in 'Part Two', is very present in all her literary writings. Author of the collection of essays *Papeles falsos* (2010), translated as *Sidewalks*, and the novels *Faces in the Crowd* (2011), *The Story of My Teeth* (2015), and *Lost Children Archive* (2019)[13], in 2020 she received a Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in Literature, and was awarded a MacArthur 'Genius' Grant, besides being longlisted for the Booker Prize and the Women's Prize for Fiction, among many others.

Often fragmented and with a tendency to spatial and temporal dislocations, Luiselli's prose never imposes a definite viewpoint. Rather, her writing shows the multiplicity of possible perspectives in telling a story by mapping and playing with different traditions and sources, while revealing a constant search for a voice of her own.

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[12] Although offshore detention centres were officially closed between 2017 and 2019, many refugees continue to be stranded in PNG or Nauru, awaiting a resolution of their refugee status in Australia.

[13] Not to be confused with the essay *Tell Me How It Ends* (see section 'Where?').

Behrouz Boochani, on the other hand, did not enjoy the same fame as Luiselli at the time of publication of *No Friend but the Mountains* – at least in the Western world – nor her 'cosmopolitist', Ivy-League-privileged position. While a long list of publications, tweets and newspaper articles signed by Valeria Luiselli can be easily found with a quick online search, Behrouz Boochani's past prior to his detention in Christmas Island can be summarized, for non-readers of Persian such as myself, to only a few biographical sentences. Given that this *mémoire* aims at reading the two texts and not at providing the author's biographies, this will not in the least be a problem.

Behrouz Boochani is an Iranian born, like Luiselli, in 1983, who as a member of the Kurdish Democratic Party and the National Union of Kurdish Students faced persecution from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard. In May 2013 he travelled to Indonesia willing to seek asylum in Australia. But just as the 50 men at the Kangaroo Point, he found himself instead detained on Christmas Island and then forcibly transferred to the Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre where he remained for almost four years. When the centre closed in 2017, Boochani was left stranded on the island for two more years.

While in Manus, Boochani made contact with a number of international journalists via a secret mobile phone (phones and personal belongings were confiscated by Australian authorities at the time of his detention), notable among whom was the sadly now-deceased *The Age*'s political editor, Michael Gordon – Boochani has acknowledged him "the work, dedication and friendship" (qtd in Tofighian, 371). Shortly afterwards he began publishing articles and essays in *The Guardian, The Sydney Morning Herald*, and the *Refugee Action Collective* recording his experiences in the detention centre. On an online TEDx Talk, Boochani has recently said that "writing has always been to me an act of resistance. In this situation in Manus it is still my resistance (…) Writing and creating is a way of fighting to getting my identity, humanity and dignity back" (Boochani, 3:55).

All in all, "the language of journalism", he notes, "is not able to describe the systematic torture that we are under in the life in Manus Prison (…) How can I describe the six years living in one of the worst prisons in the world?" (4:35). One of the many possible answers is the 'literary' language of *No Friend but the Mountains*. In 2019, while still living on the island, the text won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award, and Boochani received a A$125,000 prize. Since his request to enter Australia was again refused, Boochani watched the ceremony from PNG.

Finally, 'Who' could not close without mentioning that many professionals, volunteers, and anonymous people have taken part in the creation and writing of these two texts. They are not the work of a solitary pen, but the strength of a dedicated community who believes that a fairer world is possible.

What?

Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends*: *An Essay in Forty Questions* can be summarized as the ambitious quest for the roots of the so-called 'children immigration crisis' at the US-Mexico border during summer 2014. What were the circumstances under which thousands of undocumented children and adolescents set off on a perilous voyage across Central America to the US? What is behind this worrying phenomenon that is overwhelming the immigration detention facilities? Why are so many children fleeing home overnight with a *coyote*, namely a stranger? Is it because of the ineptitude and inaction of their governments? The Great America portrayed by Netflix? Hunger? Domestic violence? Or is it rather an explosive mix of all these ingredients? That said, Luiselli's ambition does not stagnate at the border: as she masterfully shows, when children are detained by Border Patrol officers, a new story begins. And that story might be as treacherous and appalling as is the journey from the children's homeland to the US border.

It is therefore no accident that, within the above wave of questions, the text opens with the first line of the federal immigration court's intake questionnaire for undocumented children: "[w]hy did you come to the United States?" (Luiselli, 7). The question is posed by the narrator, a Mexican lecturer at Hofstra University who, as Luiselli in real life, is struggling to obtain a green card, and, in the meantime, volunteers as interpreters of Spanish in an immigration court in New York. Her task there is seemingly simple: she first reads the questionnaire in Spanish aloud, then translates the children's answers to English, and writes them down on the blank spaces.

But as the narrator notes on the opening page, "nothing is ever that simple (…) The children's stories are always shuffled, stuttered, always shattered beyond the repair of a narrative order" (Luiselli, 7). The narrative complexity is well reflected in the structure of the text. Although Luiselli accurately follows the questionnaire – its 40 questions are gradually quoted throughout the essay, making it the text's "hypotext", in Genettian terms[14] – the story she wants to tell does not have a precise, predefined route, and, as we will see, it spreads and branches in very different directions. The more the narrator reads and researches on the topic, the more intricate and blurred the roots of the crisis, as well as the narrative's complexity, turn out to be.

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[14] This point is elaborated on in section '(What?) Mapping Voices' of 'Part Two'.

The primary reason why *Tell Me How It Ends* lacks a narrative order is because the children' stories pose the issue of narrative beginnings[15]. For every story, and every question, is the beginning of a new route, and just as there are many routes, so, too, there are many ways of narrating them. This multiplicity is obvious in the continuous shift from first person to third person narrative which seems to reveal the narrator's discomfort with focalization. Because "the whole thing is a mess", the narrator notes, "a puzzle impossible to piece together using common sense and logic" (46).

Within this puzzle, forcibly, some narrative logic can be found. The essay is divided into four sections: 'I. Border', 'II. Court', III. Home', 'IV. Community', which, in turn, are divided into fragments. In the first section, the narrator sets out on a family trip from New York to Cochise, Arizona, near the US-Mexico border. On the road, the landscape has little to do with Jack Kerouac's mythic portrait of rural America: the radio news speaks about "a biblical plague" (15) of undocumented migrants from Central America marching towards the US border, while a waitress in Roswell, New Mexico, discusses with a customer the deportation of hundreds of 'alien' children to their native lands. Upon return from her holidays, the narrator begins volunteering in an immigration court where she reads the intake questionnaire to children. Not content with simply translating the children' answers in the 'screening' – the term referring to the process by which a child is asked questions in order to be selected for the legal process of stay in the country – she simultaneously starts an investigation into the various origins of the 'children immigration crisis' declared by the Obama administration in 2014.

Most of sections 'II. Court' and 'III. Home' are dedicated to piecing together the multiple sources, data and perspectives which explain – or rather *could* explain, as we never get *the* definite version – the desperate arrival of thousands of children and teenagers at the US border; and what might happen to them later, once inside the bureaucratic labyrinth of the immigration system. That said, the different pieces and angles are not all disclosed and analyzed equally, but in different levels of narration – something to bear in mind in 'Part Two: the How'. For example, the children' stories are framed by an evident, somewhat infantile, introduction – "this is how it starts" (70) – as if the story could not be told in adult terms; or as if the narrator were telling a story within a story; or perhaps, too, seeking to hide them from everyone's eyes. Furthermore, it is worth considering the deliberate intention of voicing some sources while silencing others[16].

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[15] See section '(Why? and Where?) The Intake Questionnaire' in 'Part Two'.

[16] See section '(What?) Mapping Voices'.

In an interview Luiselli was asked about the relationship between space and materiality on her works:

> [el espacio] tiene que ver con el tipo de documento del cual labreba mi trabajo. Es decir, con qué archivo componemos ficción. Yo miro mapas siempre cuando estoy en un proceso de ficcionalizar. (…) Me interesa mucho en mi trabajo ficcional la relación entre el archivo que utilizo, el proceso mediante el cual compongo, y el resultado final (…) No me interesan los libros que se encierran sobre sí mismos tanto como otros que me instan a buscar otros libros … Ir dejando huellas me parece una manera de invitar a una mente que se sienta a dialogar con ese libro, a dialogar de una manera más activa[17]. (Cátedra Alfonso Reyes, 8:00-10:00)

Plainly, *Tell Me How It Ends* is an invitation to enter into a dialogue with the many *huellas* – 'traces' or 'sources' – that run along its pages, sources that help map out, over again, the roots and routes of mass migration in the Americas. But her map, unlike the totalizing projections of colonialist spatial representations, is constantly evolving and changing; and so the spatial limits are never fully defined.

In 'IV. Community', the last section of the essay, Luiselli opens a new door to (re)consider migration within academia, and, in doing so, she points out the way ahead for a more inclusive society. Luiselli's interest in *ir dejando huellas* – "to leave traces" – reaches up to Nassau County, New York, where the narrator teaches Advanced Conversation in Spanish at Hofstra University – later informally renamed as "migration think tank" (96). The students, not content with their passive role of listeners, founded an organization called TIIA, which stands for Teenage Immigration Integration Association, aiming to help teenagers relocate and strengthen their boundaries within the local community. Among the teenagers, there is Manu, the adolescent from Tegucigalpa whose story haunts the narrator to the point of obsessing her, "insistently, with the strange power of symbols" (43). Manu tells the narrator "a confusing, fragmented story about the MS-13 and their ongoing fight against Barrio 18" (74), a fight that takes place both in Tegucigalpa and Hempstead High School, New York, Manu's new school.

'IV. Community' not only offers us an expression of hope in new generations, but also puts aside the until then narrative 'command' of the intake questionnaire – its last question having been formulated on page 89, near the end of 'III. Home'[18]. Its absence in the closing pages makes me ponder, once more, about the value and scope of the questionnaire – what does ‘hypotext’ mean in terms of literary setting? These and other questions related to voice, plot and setting will be explored further in ‘Part Two’ of this *mémoire*. But for the moment, let us simply highlight the idea that, unlike most of the academic research quoted in Luiselli’s essay, *Tell Me How It Ends* does not withdraw into itself. Its end is only a new beginning.

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[17] "[Space] has to do with the type of document my work draws on. That is, with what kind of document fiction is created. I always look at maps when I'm in the process of fictionalizing. In my work, I take a great interest in the linkages between the archive I use, the writing process, and the result. I'm not that interested in the books that withdraw into themselves as much as in those books that push me to look for others. Leaving traces seems to me a way of inviting someone to sit and enter into a dialogue with a book, to communicate in a more active way".

[18] This point is elaborated on in section '(Why? and Where?) The Intake Questionnaire'.

*****

If *Tell Me How It Ends* can be summarized as the quest for the circumstances or factors that triggered the 2014 ‘children immigration crisis’ at the US-Mexico border, Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* might be viewed as a first-person glimpse into the structural violence of the Australian offshore immigration policies. Typed on various secret phones kept inside a mattress, Boochani’s portrait vividly depicts savage forms of torture and control under what he labels a prison regime. Despite the fact that many journalists, scholars and outside observers, such as the aforementioned Dr Zimmerman visited the centre’s facilities, there are just a few portraits written and published by the prisoners themselves[19]. As Boochani writes in ‘A Disclaimer’, “[t]his book has been written to give a truthful account of the experience of Australia’s Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre, and to convey a truthful first-hand experience of what it has been like to be detained *within* that system” (‘A Disclaimer’, italics are mine). Focalization – the point of view from the inside out – will therefore be essential when reading Boochani’s text, and the first question to ponder will be: who is watching who? A great deal of my analysis in the second part of this *mémoire* will address this concern. The text, I argue, can be thought of as a ‘poetics of countersurveillance’, bearing witness while transcending conventional *reportage* writing. It reads like poetry.

But for now, let us outline its ‘plot’. *No Friend but the Mountains* begins *in medias res*: two trucks are carrying undocumented passengers somewhere in Indonesia under “a sky the colour of intense anxiety” (Boochani, 1) to a boat aiming to reach Australia. A strong sense of presentness impregnates the first four chapters[20] – the text is divided into 12 with many subsections – as the events of the passengers’ journey unfold: the passage to the boat is followed by the perilous voyage in the ocean; the rescue by an Indonesian fishing vessel; the transfer to a British cargo ship, where the narrator is convinced that “this nightmare has come to a close" (50); and, finally, the transfer to an Australian warship that forcibly takes them to Christmas Island, the country's external territory in the Indian Ocean.

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[19] Other portraits are Abdul Aziz Muhamat’s podcast, *The Messenger*, which received the Martin Ennals Awards in 2019, Kurdish musician Moz Azimi’s songs from Manus, or Mohammad Ali Maleki’s book of poetry *Dream of Death*. Furthermore, media such as *The Guardian* or *Al Jazeera* featured videos sent by detainees, see for example, *Al Jazeera*, ‘Manus Island: Refugees living in fear, dire conditions”, https://www.aljazeera.com/videos/2017/11/10/manus-island-refugees-living-in-fear-dire-conditions, 10 November 2017, but these were recorded *after* the Detention Center was officially closed.

[20] See section ‘(Why?)Trapped in Limbo’ of ‘Part Two’.

The odyssey is told by a perceptive first-person narrator with seemingly little interaction with his fellow travellers, but whose wide-open eyes are constantly monitoring the scene. From these first chapters, to be read as a prelude to the long period in Manus Prison which covers more than two thirds of the text, it is noteworthy the narrator's versatile and watchful gaze. For instance, in the vivid images on the boat – "[t]ragedy has struck our boat already, but the craft still proceeds at a steady speed, like a song in tune with the highs and lows of the waves" (21) – and the subsequent traumatic rescue: "[t]his rescue occurs to me as a series of distorted and broken images. Just like a scene from a film consisting of a few frames, separated from one another but interconnected" (42).

The narrator's focalization reminds me of a silent and hidden camera travelling with a group of asylum seekers. Among those, we find 'Azadeh', 'The Blue Eyed Boy', or 'The Friend Of The Blue Eyed', the names and personal features having been modified "to ensure that those who are vulnerable within the system have been adequately obscured", as Boochani notes in 'A Disclaimer' (Boochani, 'A Disclaimer'). As translator Tofighian points out in his epilogue 'Translator's Tale: A Window to the Mountains', "[n]aming has special aesthetic, interpretative and political functions in the book. For Behrouz, renaming things is a way to affirm his personhood and establish a sense of authority" (Tofighian, 390). Naming, remaining, but also not naming – let us not forget the passage from the visit of the *nameless* Australian Minister for Immigration to the island (pages 312–315) – is crucial in the (re)configuration of Manus Prison's spatial representation; starting with the very name of 'Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre', later renamed as 'Manus Prison'[21].

It must be pointed out that the camera-like narrator never speaks on behalf of others – other's conversations, thoughts or opinions are not reported – nor does he explore the characters' personalities, restricting himself instead to what he sees, and *how* he sees it. In this sense, an emphasis is placed on "the entirety of the whole scene" (250) and its parts; the narrator's eyes always balanced between the ensemble and the details, the community and the individual. That said, he does explore his own mind, identity and past, as in the long "warship meditations" of chapter four and chapter ten, where he takes the route of memory, heading back to his homeland Kurdistan – which can be read as "a way of [reaffirming] his personhood”, as Tofighian notes. The ways of seeing and the narrator’s different eyes will be explored in the second part.

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[21] The change in name has caught the eye of many readers. For example, Felicity Plunkett has written that "[t]he word expresses the loss of asylum seekers' freedom and highlights a dark irony: a prison legally holds prisoners as punishment for a crime or while awaiting trial" (Plunkett), and Jeff Sparrow has noted that the "characterization" of the facility where the narrator is detained as 'Manus Prison' instead of 'Regional Processing Centre' "universalizes his account" (Sparrow).

All in all, the boldness the narrator shows when describing a scene contrasts with the uncertainty about his whereabouts and his fate: “I don’t know exactly where we are out here – I have no idea how far we are from say, Christmas Island (…) I hate the moon. It tells me we are lost, that we are wandering displaced” (60,61). These words prelude the fact that the narrator no longer controls his own fate. From chapter five, “A Christmas (Island) Tale/ A Stateless Rohingya Boy Sent Away to Follow the Star of Exile”, he falls into the clutches of the Australian offshore immigration policies, his detention marking a turning point in the plot – which, as I read it, is divided into two parts: the journey, from chapters one to five; and the imprisonment, from chapters five to twelve.

From then on, the narrator is not only watching others, but is consciously aware of being stared at, as outlined in the opening lines of chapter five: “*A cage / High walls / Wire fencing / Electronic doors / CCTV cameras / A cage – high walls – wire fencing – electronic doors – CCTV cameras / Surveillance cameras gazing at twenty individuals /*” (81, italics in the original[22]) – each line referring to the different components of the surveillance regime. In Boochani’s portrait, poetry frames the discourse. Prose is echoed in variations by a speaker – or is it a chorus? The narrator’s subconscious? – adding a further layer to the narration. Yet it is difficult to define where prose ends and poetry begins as, for example, when the narrator notes “[f]ear: a mountain of ice that has also completely disappeared under water – the mother of all tortures” (155). As will be seen in ‘Part Two’, poetry will also play an important role in the prison’s (re)configuration; words matter.

The surveillance regime impregnates every corner; even the toilets “have CCTV cameras” (84), and “prisoners” – the term the narrator uses – are “being locked in a cage” (81). A number, not a name, identifies each prisoner – the narrator’s is MEG45. Christmas Island’s cage, however, is only temporary, as prisoners are forced into exile to Manus Island: “I came to Australia and suddenly ended up on a remote island, ended up on an island the name of which I have never heard before” (107), the narrator notes on his arrival to Manus. The exile has taken place under the watchful eye of a group of journalists and interpreters who are also under the narrator’s eyes.

A spatial description of “Fox Prison” opens up the narrator’s time in Manus: “[t]he prison looks like it is in ruins. Four rows of small rooms – they seem more like ready-made containers” (109). From then on, lengthy passages of the text are spent “wander[ing] around the strange prison” (110). Interestingly, the narrator’s meanderings not only draw a map of the site, but also unveil its architecture, both in spatial and ideological terms. Much of chapters six to twelve will therefore be devoted to studying, and (paradoxically) systematizing, what the narrator calls 'The Kyriarchal System'. The term is derived from 'kyriarchy' which, as the translator's footnote clarifies, "was first coined in 1992 by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to describe a theory of interconnected social systems established for the purposes of domination, oppression and submission" (Tofighian qtd in Boochani, 124). In Boochani's portrait 'The Kyriarchal System' has subjectivity, becoming, somehow, a character itself.

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[22] From here on, quotes in italics will be kept as in the original.

But let us remember, once more, that as there is only one narrator, there is only one focalizer, and so no one is excluded from the narrator's gaze. His eyes shift from the general overview of the prison – for instance, the descriptions of the ubiquitous and endless queuing lines in chapter eight – to particular events which take place on a specific moment in time – the incident between 'Maysam The Whore' and 'The Prime Minister' when the latter was "taking a shit in an isolated corner" (183), while being secretly watched by 'Maysam The Whore'. In Manus Prison, "three basic elements" (145), are watching each other while also being watched: "the prisoners, the local people, the Australians" (145) are the three groups, all subject to 'The Kyriarchal System'. That said, the prisoners and the Australians are not considered equal by the narrator: while the first have a name and a personal identity, the second are a uniformed, impersonal collective, lacking identity, and "creativity"; another key word from the text as the narrator sustains that creativity is what helps prisoners overcome and survive the prison's logic – it grants emancipation from the prison's order.

Through the narrator's lens, routine is a form of torture: "living within the pointless cycle of three courses: breakfast, lunch and dinner" (203), as is going to the doctor's, or falling into the clutches of the "International Health and Medical Services" – "the sick person is caught up in hate and dependency – entangled" (309). In the text's second part, the *architecture* of 'The Kyriarchal System' is thoroughly and methodically unveiled, as will be seen more detailed in 'Part Two: and the How''. The narrator, who is one of "the sheep" – the term he employs several times to describe the prisoners' attitude and position – is rebelling against "the shepherd", "the Australian officers" (233).

In the last chapter, "12 – In Twilight / The Colours of War", both 'The Kyriarchal System' and the plot collapse. "*In twilight / I maintain the belief that the moon is out / But perhaps the moon from the lamps in the prison has created the illusion / There is so much light flooding the space that we can see the gangs of men /*" (327). Gangs of men revolt against "the all-encompassing system of oppressive governmentality" (329), shortly after the visit of the nameless Australian Minister for Immigration to the island – this chapter, like the whole book, is based on true events. "For the first time", the narrator recalls, "the prisoners did not feel oppressed by the fences. For the first time the rules and regulations meant nothing – the system of oppression had been erased" (342). But the Australian officers and the Papus – the gender-neutral way to refer to the locals – shortly emerged onto the war scene, killing any hint of liberation, and regaining control of their sheep: “[t]he gaze of those bastard officers scours the whole place. Their eyes are everywhere (…) The prisoners are docile sheep” (352).

The revolt and the book end with Reza Barati’s death. The Australian officers have killed ‘The Gentle Giant’.

Why?

In geopolitics, the chronology of events is essential. Behrouz Boochani fled Iran to Indonesia, aiming for Australia, in May 2013. His first attempt to reach Australian shores by boat failed and he was forced to return to his point of departure in Kendari City. When he tried again in mid-July 2013, former Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, was signing off agreements with PNG and the tiny country of Nauru to facilitate the transfer of asylum seekers entering Australian waters without visas to offshore detention centres. The so-called ‘Stop the Boats’ policy had drastic consequences. As of 19 July 2013, any asylum seeker arriving to the country without following the official legal procedure would be ineligible to resettle in Australia, besides being indefinitely detained offshore, as was the case of Boochani and all the other passengers travelling with him –the narrator in *No Friend but the Mountains* wonders, “[w]hy did I have to be so unlucky? Why did I have to arrive in Australia exactly four days after they effected a merciless law?” (89).

That said, Rudd’s aggressive border policies did not emerge out of the blue. Indeed, their origins might date back to Captain’s Cook voyage in 1770, as J. M. Coetzee has written in his review of Boochani’s book in *The New York Review* (the Nobel Prize in Literature draws more attention to the historical context than to the text itself): “Australia”, Coetzee writes, “did have a racial problem, and had had one ever since British colonists established themselves on the continent. The problem was that the colonists held themselves to be intrinsically (in the language of the day, racially) superior to Aboriginal Australians, and did not regard this conviction as a problem” (Coetzee). The “unproblematic racism” of British colonists – in Coetzee terms “a problem that is not a problem” (Coetzee) – extends to today, even though Australia has been traditionally known to be a country of and for immigrants, many of whom arrived precisely by boat. This fact was gracefully expressed by critically acclaimed Australian poet Les Murray in ‘Immigrant voyage’:

> My wife came out on the *Goya*
> in the mid-year of our century.
>
> In the fogs of that winter
> many hundred ships were sounding;
> the DP camps were being washed to sea.
> (…) the children heard their parents:
> Argentina? Or Australia?
> Less politics, in Australia (Murray, 130).

This historical contradiction can be further explained with two foreign boats: the ‘Pender Bay’, and the ‘Tampa’.

In 1989, 26 Cambodians arrived in Australia seeking asylum, without prior authorization, on a boat named ‘Pender Bay’. They were subsequently arrested under ‘The Migration Act 1958’ – the act of the Parliament of Australia stating that the country governs its immigration. This meant, and still means, that, although Australia signed the ‘1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees’, it does not confer on an asylum-seeker the legal right to seek asylum in the country – as any person arriving without the required papers is deemed ‘illegal’. The unfortunate Cambodians spent two and a half years incarcerated in mainland Australia, only to be finally deported to Cambodia. In 1994, a legislative change in ‘The Migration Act’ stated that all people coming to Australia by boat without the required papers would be detained.

In August 2001, a Norwegian freighter named ‘Tampa’ rescued 438 passengers from a foundering vessel on its way to Australia. The Liberal-National Coalition, led by John Howard, which was in power from 1996 to 2007, denied the landing of the passengers on Christmas Island, the Australian territory in the Indian Ocean. After many negotiations between the Australian, Indonesian, and Norwegian governments, some passengers were sent to resettle in New Zealand, while others were indefinitely detained in Nauru. The *Tampa* incident resulted in two reforms: the introduction of the so-called ‘Pacific Solution’, which stated that for the ‘Refugee Convention’, Christmas Island was no longer part of Australia – denying asylum seekers protection under Australian law – and the opening of the Australia’s Regional Offshore Processing Centres in Nauru and Manus Island, PNG, in exchange for strong financial support.

The two centres remained opened during the Howard years, hosting hundreds of ill-fated migrants who were trapped in limbo on their way to Australia; the centres served as a paradigm of a belligerent border policy which was, and still is, highly appreciated by the dominant Australian political parties (Labors and Liberals). As Dr Michael Grewcock, Senior Lecture of Criminal Law at UNSW Law, noted shortly after the passing of the ‘19th of July Law’ in 2013, “the major political parties are committed to … us[ing] border policing as a vehicle for reinforcing their own authority and asserting their capacity to rule. Rather than being an electorally necessary reaction to public sentiment, being able to “control the borders” has become a marker of political competence" (Grewcock, 2013, 103). The centres were closed between 2007 and 2012, coinciding with a sharp decrease in the number of arrivals, but they reopened in late 2012 by Julia Gillard, leader of the Labor party, marking the outset of a hostile and militarized approach to border policies and asylum seekers. Gillard was then succeeded by Kevin Rudd, who signed the controversial agreement with PNG and Nauru to detain asylum seekers offshore.

Behrouz Boochani arrived on Christmas Island in July 2013 and was transferred one month later to the Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre, where he was detained for four years until the Supreme Court of PNG declared the centre illegal, and it was forced to shut down. Boochani, along with all the other prisoners who remained in Manus Island, was left stranded *sans papiers* on the island until late 2019 when, with the sponsorship of *Amnesty International*, he entered New Zealand to attend a literary festival and stayed in the country with refugee status. As Boochani tirelessly continues to denounce, in mid-summer 2021, dozens of asylum seekers are still stranded in Manus and Nauru eight years after their arrival. Their crime? Seeking asylum in Australia.

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Sadly, the plight of undocumented children within the bureaucratic labyrinth of the US immigration system is not too different from that of asylum seekers arriving into Australia by boat. It is well-known that mass immigration, and in particular child migration requiring social support and guidance, is flatly rejected by all Western countries. Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends* delves into the 2014 'children immigration crisis' in the US, when an estimated number of 102,000 unaccompanied children and adolescents were detained at or near the US border. It is worth recalling that this so-called 'crisis' was not an isolated incident, but a peak in the never-ceasing migratory flux towards the US. Though it is not helpful to discuss the historical and legal background of the crisis – as this is thoroughly described in Luiselli's essay – it is worth mentioning some points in particular which help contextualize the reading of the essay.

To begin with, an "unaccompanied alien child" (UAC) is defined as "a person who is under the age of 18; lacks lawful immigration status; and either (1) has no parent or legal guardian in the United States or (2) has no parent or legal guardian in the country who is available to provide care and physical custody of the child", according to 'Section 462' of the 'Homeland Security Act of 2002' (quoted in Manuel and Garcia, 1, 2). The 'Homelands Security Act' was passed by the US Senate in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks to reinforce 'national security'. When children and teenagers arrive in US territory – most of them through Rio Grande Valley, southern Texas, or Arizona – they nearly always turn themselves into Border Patrol officers of the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP). If the children are already inside the United States, they are apprehended by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) – the '*hielera*' mentioned in Luiselli's essay, which means an icebox in Spanish. After identifying the minors, and provided that they are not Mexican or Canadian (in which case they are immediately deported)[23], the CBP and ICE have to either release the children to their parents, legal guardian or adult relatives, or transfer them to HHS officials within three to five days. Following 'The Flores Agreement', signed in 1997, the HHS then "must place children in the 'least restrictive' setting according to their age and any special needs" (quoted in Congressional Research Service).

Yet, obviously, this legal procedure did not always exist. In 1985, Jenny Lisette Flores, a 15-year-old teenager from El Salvador, was apprehended trying to cross the border by the now-extinct Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and mercilessly sent to an adult prison. Following her detention, the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law filed a class action lawsuit, Flores v. Meese, against Edwin Meese, former US General Attorney. After many comings and goings, 'The Flores Settlement Agreement' was finally reached in 1997, defining the limits on the length of time the children can be incarcerated for, and his/her/their (temporary) conditions. Another major event in the improvement of undocumented children's legal conditions was the approval of the 'Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals' (DACA) by the Obama administration in 2012, which allows people who arrive in the US after crossing the border without the required papers to receive a "period of deferred action" from deportation once they are 18.

As Luiselli wisely relates in *Tell Me How It Ends*, the reasons for undertaking the hazardous odyssey of travelling from somewhere in Central America to the US border are more life-threatening than the journey itself – and no law can reflect the speechless urgency of sending your kids off with a stranger on the top of a train. All this is put plainly in 'Cassette-tape', by Salvadoran poet Javier Zamora:

> "You don't need more than food,
> a roof, and clothes on your back."
> I'd add Mom's warmth, the need
> for war to stop. Too many dead
> cops, too many tattooed dead.
> Does my country need more of us
> to flee with nothing but a bag?
> Corrupt coops shot "gagsters"
> from armored cars. *Javiercito*,
> parents say, *we'll send for you soon*. (Zamora in *Granta*, 2016, 134, 135)

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[23] The 'Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act' was signed by President Bush in 2008. As Luiselli notes in her essay, "[t]his amendment was Bush's last gift to American immigration law in his vast legacy of *chingaderas*, in Urban Mexican slang, or nasty-shitty policies, in approximate English translation" (53).

Where?

The stories of the millions of migrants like Behrouz Boochani or the undocumented children featuring in Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends*, are the travellers' tales of our times. If in *Odyssey*, Homer opens 'Book One' beginning "[t]ell me, O Muse, of the many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Toy" (Homer, 1), Valeria Luiselli does the same when she begs for an ending to the nightmares of the children who crossed the jungle, the desert, the border, and were then imprisoned in detention facilities, only to be released to their relatives and receive a 'Notice of Appeal' in court. These are the explorers of the 21st century, embarking on death-threatening odysseys across the Mediterranean or the Indian Ocean, travelling by foot, in the back of a truck, or on the top of La Bestia, discovering new lands in the backyard of Western countries, experiencing the world as curious and critical outsiders.

For its winter 2017 issue 'Journeys', following an accusation of "colonial high-handedness"[24], *Granta* magazine raised the urgent, although well-known, question of "Is travel writing dead?" to a diverse group of critically acclaimed writers and poets of the English-speaking-world. Compellingly, out of the thirteen interviewees, five focused their answers on refugees/migrant narratives or their own experiences of migration. The remaining eight authors – still the majority – either recalled the good old days of English or England-domiciled writers telling us about abroad (for instance, Robert Macfarlane's elegantly written, but lacking in freshness, nostalgic piece on 1977, the *annus mirabilis*[25]), or theorized about the meaning of travel writing and liveliness. Irish poet Tara Bergin puts it plainly in the last entry of the issue; she writes, "all writing is travel writing … Metaphor is Greek for 'transfer'. A poet told me this. Writing is being a tourist on your own street; writing is spying on your neighbour; writing is having five addresses; four names; three passports" (Bergin in *Granta*, 222); writing, as Bergin suggests, is a way of being both self and other.

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[24] Sigrid Rausing, editor and publisher of *Granta* magazine, begins the introduction of the issue writing that "[t]wo authors recently accused Granta of colonial high-handedness. One complaint was trivial; the other, about a proposed photo-essay, less so. But whether the accusations were valid or not, they did make us think about the state of travel writing right now" (Rausing in *Granta*, 10).

[25] In 1977, Patrick Leigh Fermor published *A Time of Gifts*, Bruce Chatwin *In Patagonia*, and John McPhee *Coming into the Country*.

Yet still, the words that look ahead aiming for the survival of the genre – if ever 'travel writing' was a genre … because, what is a genre if not a colonizing and out-dated way of categorizing the world of texts? – are to be found in the minority of writers who draw their attention to the "literature of checkpoints and fences", as British novelist Rana Dasgupta refers to the literature of and written by refugees (Dasgupta in *Granta*, 158). "Travel literature will always be with us", Dasgupta remarks, but observes that "the centre of experience also shifts in the world". Lindsay Hilsum, the international Editor for *Channel 4 News* and a regular contributor in *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, among others, notes that "[w]e need a new genre of travel writing, gleaned from the stories refugees and migrants tell housing officials, charity centres, immigration officers, health workers and school admissions staff" (Hilsum in *Granta*, 59); and Mosim Hamid points out, perhaps a little simplistically, that "we are all humans, that the experience of migration unites all human beings, that movement through time is our shared journey" (Hamid in *Granta*, 155).

But if there is a contribution that, in my humble opinion, sheds true light on travel writing today, it is that of Alexis Wright. The author of the monumental *Carpentaria* is without a shadow of a doubt one of the voices more entitled to speak about the land known as Australia – Wright is of Waanyi descent, the people who dwelled the lands of the Gulf of Carpentaria for thousands of years. Waanyi people, as she beautifully depicts in her texts, share a unique experience with the land. As she explains in *Granta*: "[t]o aboriginal people of Australia, the land itself holds a vast archive of ancestral travel through a spiritual writing … Reading travel writing is part of my endless search to get closer to the world – even if just as a poor visitor trying to look through the cracks of other people's culture" (Wright in *Granta*, 93). Land means home, but Wright warns us, "the world is changing and many people have no place to call home. Some of the most important kinds of travel writing now are stories of flight, written by people who belong to the millions of asylum seekers in the world" (93). In her contribution, Wright mentions the name of Behrouz Boochani and his "message to the world in the anthology *Behind the Wire*" (93), in which the Kurdish journalist and writer imparts upon people the "need to change our imagination" (Boochani quoted in *Granta*, 93). Wright wrote these lines in the winter of 2017; by then, Boochani had already been detained on Manus Island for more than three years and his future looked rather bleak.

The literature of the "many people who have no place to call home" is becoming more and more numerous as the number of refugees and displaced people grows bigger every day[26]. However, given the precarious and unstable situation of most refugees, migrants and stateless people, the transmission and publication of their work is considered little more than a miracle. As Coetzee has written, "[g]etting *No Friend but the Mountains* off the island and into the hands of readers in Australia was an achievement in itself" (Coetzee). In addition to Boochani's portrait of Manus Island, other contemporary works written by and about migrants or refugees are Leila Abdelzaraq's graphic novel *Baddawi* (Just World Books, 2015), Javier Zamora's poetry debut *Unaccompanied* (Copper Canyon Press, 2017), *The Good Immigrant* collection of twenty-one essays edited by Nikesh Shukla (Unbound, 2016) or the four volumes of *Refugee Tales* (Comma Press), the powerful collection of stories by UK asylums seekers, indefinite detainees by British immigration authorities, and contemporary, trendy writers such as Bernardine Evaristo or Monica Ali.

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[26] According to UNHCR statistics, there were "82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2020" (UNHCR).

All in all, *No Friend But the Mountains* has not only been read as an asylum seeker narrative – given that Boochani was detained when he entered Australian waters, here the term refugee narrative would sound at the very least perverse. For a large majority of Australian literary critics and writers, Boochani's portrait has been confined neatly within the box of "world prison literature" (Flanagan in Boochani, xi) or "literature of incarceration" (Sparrow), starting with writer Richard Flanagan, who begins his foreword to Boochani's first edition by saying that the text "can rightly take its place on the shelf of world prison literature, alongside such diverse works as Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*…" (xi), a standpoint shared by poet and critic Felicity Plunkett. The book, she writes, "is a work of witness … In its steady witness, *No Friend But the Mountains* recalls accounts of the Shoah such as Primo Levi's *If This Is a Man* (1947)" (Plunkett).

Among the long group of reviewers and essayists on Boochani's book – the list of which, spanning up to 2020, can be found in the introduction of Omid Tofighian's article 'Introducing Manus Prison theory: knowing border violence' (Tofighian, 2020) – notable is Jeff Sparrow's dazzling reading for the *Sydney Review of Books*. The writer and editor draws a comparison between Boochani's text and three timeless classics of prison literature: Victor Serge's *Men in Prison* (1930), Jean Améry's *At the Mind's Limit: Contemplations by a survivor on Auschwitz and its realities* (1966), and Alexander Berkman's *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912). When the narrator of *No Friend But the Mountains* arrives on Christmas Island he receives the "first gift from Australia": "a pair of flip-flops" (79). The comment highlights a dark irony. Jeff Sparrow compares the narrator's first encounter with the prison's uniform with Serge's *Men in Prison* – "Man imprisoned differs from man in general even in his outward appearance. Prison marks him from the very first hour", Serge wrote (Serge quoted in Sparrow). Sparrow argues that "the uniform externalizes the transformation of the detainee" from a citizen to a prisoner, chronicling "how the road unfurls for detained refugees" within the border-policing system which, as he elaborates on, somehow resembles, but also differentiates from, Auschwitz (Sparrow).

Given its great topicality, *No Friend But the Mountains* has also been read and discussed within the framework of current political and legal debates – or, as otherwise stated, the book has been used as an excuse to write about something else other than the book. These informative articles feature mainly in Australian and international news. Yet within this trend, it is also worth considering briefly Dr Michael Grewcock's and writer J.M. Coetzee's contributions, as the two have already been mentioned in previous sections of this *mémoire*. Dr Grewcock tirelessly campaigns for refugees' and migrants' rights from within academia. Author of *Border Crimes: Australia's War on Illicit Migrants* (Sidney Institute of Criminology, 2010), he has published extensively on Australia's border policing measures against unauthorized refugees and the recent history of state criminality[27]. Coetzee's long piece for *The New York Review* wisely and elegantly delves into Australia's hostility to refugees throughout history, but, sadly, it leaves aside the book – the Nobel Prize winner only touches it, rather superficially, at the end, if only to question Tofighian's afterword which he describes as "somewhat hectoring" and "empty". Perhaps Coetzee's best contribution is the dazzling tale he recounts at the beginning, parodying the remainder of the text: "Let us suppose that I am the heir of an enormous state. Stories about my generosity abound…"[28] (Coetzee).

It is difficult not to write about these narratives of migration and border violence without focusing only on their political and legal context – perhaps because the context addresses highly topical and urgent issues, or, perhaps because the context sells better than the content. The reception of *Tell Me How It Ends* on both sides of the Atlantic[29] encountered the same superficial reading as *No Friend*. Many news articles featured Luiselli's essay to introduce and contextualize the 'children immigration crisis' in the US. The essay was published in the aftermath of Trump's victory, and it was rapidly fitted into the box of anti-Wall writing[30].

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[27] See for example: Michael, Grewcock, "Back to the Future: Australian Border Policing Under Labor, 2007–2013", *State Crime Journal*, vol. 3 (1), 2014, pp. 102–125; Michael, Grewcock, "'Our lives is in danger': Manus Island and the end of asylum", *Race&Class*, vol. 59 (2), 2017, pp. 70–89.

[28] The full tale is: "Let us suppose that I am the heir of an enormous estate. Stories about my generosity abound. And let us suppose that you are a young man, ambitious but in trouble with the authorities in your native land. You make a momentous decision: you will set out on a voyage across the ocean that will bring you to my doorstep, where you will say, *I am here—feed me, give me a home, let me make a new life!*
Unbeknown to you, however, I have grown tired of strangers arriving on my doorstep *saying I am here, take me in*—so tired, so exasperated that I say to myself: *Enough! No longer will I allow my generosity to be exploited!* Therefore, instead of welcoming you and taking you in, I consign you to a desert island and broadcast a message to the world: *Behold the fate of those who presume upon my generosity by arriving on my doorstep unannounced!* (Coetzee, italics in the original).

[29] A shorter version of the essay was first written in English and appeared in *Freeman's Literary Magazine* in 2016. Luiselli then expanded the text in Spanish and titled it *Los niños perdidos: un ensayo en cuarenta preguntas* (Sexto Piso, 2017). This version was partially translated into English by Lizzie Davis and published as *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* by *4th Estate*.

[30] Dr Macarena García-Avello argues in 'Translating nation in a global era: Valeria Luiselli's approach to the child migration crisis', that anti-immigration and racist feelings had "engulfed the public sphere" long before Donald Trump came into power, as it is described in Luiselli's essay (García-Avello, 149, 150).

Moreover, *Tell Me* was shortly followed by Luiselli's novel *Lost Children Archive* (2019), the fictionalization of the family trip from New York to Arizona near the US border, undoubtedly echoing the essay; but, unlike *Tell Me*, "keeping the crisis as background noise", as poet Javier Zamora has pointed out (Zamora). In an interview with him, Luiselli explains how she wrote the two texts simultaneously:

> What happened to me is that at some point I was writing the novel—I started writing it in the summer of 2014—and at some point, I started to use it as a vehicle for my political rage and for my political stances and I started writing more directly about the immigration crisis within the novel.
> After a while, I started to realize that I was really messing the novel up. I wasn't really doing justice to the novel, I was kind of suffocating the prose. And I wasn't doing justice to the issue. So I stopped writing it and I wrote *Tell Me How it Ends.* (Luiselli quoted in Zamora)

Given the similarities between the content of the two texts, most of Luiselli's reviewers and critics have focused on *Lost Children Archive* at the expense of overlooking the essay (for example, the exquisitely written and balanced reading by James Wood for *The New Yorker*, "Writing About Writing About the Border Crisis"). The essay, Wood writes, "is an achievement of activism" (Wood). That said, *Tell Me* has been read "as a discursive space revolving around the metaphor of translation that adopts different layers of meaning related to connectivity" by Dr Macarena García-Avello (García-Avello, 150), or as outlining "la función que adquiere la tarea de traducir respecto de la experiencia traumática que motiva este relato"[31] by Dr Ilse Logie (Logie, 104).

In an entirely different direction, independent researcher and writer Irmgard Emmelhainz argues that Luiselli is taking the side of neo-liberalism as she does not position herself otherwise. The political discourse of *Tell Me How It Ends*, writes Emmelhainz, "es la moral de estar en lo correcto. Con su no-postura, Luiselli evade el cuestionamiento de su propia tendencia política y del lugar desde el que escribe … en vez de golpear el estupor alienado del sujeto neoliberal, Luiselli sucumbe a la tentación de interpelar al espectador a nivel afectivo"[32] (Emmelhainz). Emmelhainz's argument is partially shared by Professor Julio Enríquez-Ornelas; "Luiselli", he holds, "writes from a place of privilege and Eurocentrism because there is a fundamental absence of pain in her text … Luisellli's work does not denounce this system of oppression set in place for children. She simply gives it visibility on the page for readers to learn more about, so it becomes an extension of the spectacle of terror and fear that is the borderland." (Enríquez-Ornelas, 136). It is pointless to enter into the debate of whether there is "a fundamental absence of pain in her text" or not, the answer is rather obvious, but if something seems clear to me it is that not only does Luiselli denounce the "system of oppression", but also, more importantly, she unveils the architecture, the layers and the foundations of the border-policing systematic violence.

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[31] "the function of translating in regards to the traumatic experience that moved the story"..

[32] "[has] the moral attitude of being right. With her lack of position, Luiselli avoids questioning her own political tendencies and the place where she writes from … Instead of pushing the alienated amazement of the neoliberal subject, Luiselli falls into the temptation of addressing the spectator at the affective level".

Lastly, *Tell Me How It Ends* also fits into the box of "the literature of checkpoints and fences", as British novelist Rana Dasgupta referred to migrants and refugees' narratives in *Granta*. But the essay can also take its place in the long list of titles inspired by, or set in, the Mexico-US border. For example, Dr Ilse Logie refers in her article to a growing corpus of texts, among them Emilio Monge's *Among the Lost* (translated from the Spanish *Las tierras arrasadas*), Yuri Herrera's *Signs Preceding the End of the World* (*Señales que precederán al fin del mundo*), or Antonio Ortuño's *La fila india* (quoted in Logie, 104). The names of Francisco Cantú, former Border Patrol officer and author of *The Line Becomes a River. Dispatches from the Border*, Cristina Rivera Garza, Sandra Cisneros, Antonio Ruiz Camacho or the now-classic Gloria Anzaldúa should be added, among many others, to the list of contemporary writers who have explored, crossed, transcended, contemplated, reinvented, and reimagined the border that probably most simultaneously fascinates and strikes fear in the world. By its nature, the border is undefinable. But poet Alberto Ríos plays with definition in 'The Border: A Double Sonnet':

> The border is a line that birds cannot see.
> The border is a beautiful piece of paper folded carelessly in half.
> …
> The border used to be an actual place, but now, it is the act of a thousand imaginations.
> The border, the word *border*, sounds like *order*, but in this place they do not rhyme.
> (Ríos)

When?

So far in this ‘Part One’, I have focused on answering four questions related to Valeria Luiselli’s *Tell Me How It Ends* and Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains*: 1) *Who* are the political and non-political agents featured in the two texts, and, by extension, what are the political issues? 2) *What* are the two texts about? 3) How and *why* was the border-policing issue reached? and 4) *Where* are the texts located within the landscape of global literature and political debates, and how have they been read? These questions have helped us place the two texts within a precise and defined context; however, they largely left aside, or perhaps only touching upon rather superficially, the most important aspect of this *mémoire*: the text itself. Thereby, the ‘Part Two’ of this *mémoire* shifts the focus of the analysis to the form of the texts: ‘the How’.

I like to read these texts as *crónicas*; the term is translated in English as ‘long pieces of reportage’ ‘literary journalism’, ‘non-fiction novels’, ‘new journalism’, or perhaps more simply as ‘chronicles’. Countless are the traditions and movements that trace the origins of this genre: some say it was invented by Truman Capote in Kansas in the year 1959, others refer to Homer’s *Iliad* and the ancient times of epic poems, and a few argue that *crónicas* invented America. Without wishing to enter into this fruitless and circular debate, I will restrict myself to repeating Martín Caparrós’s – probably the world’s greatest authority in *crónicas* today – short but sharp definition of *lacrónica*[33]: “lacrónica es un texto periodístico que intenta mirar de otra manera eso que todos miran o podrían mirar” (Caparrós, 55)[34]. In light of this definition, the ‘Part Two’ of this *mémoire* deals with the form of Valeria Luiselli and Behrouz Boochani’s *crónicas*. Mirroring the ‘Five W’s’, the texts are explored through the lenses of four narratological categories: the narrator, focalization, the plot, and spatialization, as defined by Mieke Bal in *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (University of Toronto Press, 1985). The first section, ‘(Who?)’, examines the identity of the narrators in the two texts; the second section, ‘(What?)’, considers focalization – Caparrós’s “looking differently at the issue” – following Mieke Bal’s definition of the term; the third section, ‘(Why?)’, covers the plot, the timeline and sequencing; and the fourth ‘(Where?)’, spatialization and its meanings.

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[33] Caparrós writes ‘lacrónica’ together.

[34] “thereportage is a journalistic text that tries to look differently at the issue that everyone is or could be looking at”.

Part Two: and the How

(Who?) Migrant Narrators Talk About Themselves and About Border Violence

(‘Narrator’ is defined by Mieke Bal as “the linguistic subject, a function and not a person, which expresses itself in the language that constitutes the text. (…) The narrator is the most central concept in the analysis of narrative texts” (Bal, 16,19). She also notes, “it hardly needs mentioning that this agent is not the (biographical) author of the narrative” (16). The narrator of Tell Me How It Ends *is not Valeria Luiselli, and nor is Behrouz Boochani that of* No Friend but the Mountains.*)*

It is always appropriate to begin an analysis by emphasizing what unites rather than what separates the objects of inquiry – particularly if these deal with migration, a topic often seen in polarizing terms of *us* and *them*. Although it is evident that many differences divide the two narrators – all narrators are unique – they have a critical feature in common: they are readers of poetry.

In Valeria Luiselli’s *Tell Me How It Ends*, a central excerpt of Spanish poet Miguel Hernández’s ‘Elegy’ drives into the narrator’s mind “the way only the sharpest images can” (75). The poem honours the death of Ramón Sijé, picturing the irretrievable loss within the vastness of the soil: “I want to gnaw at the earth with my teeth/ I want to take the earth apart bit by bit/ with dry, burning bites/ I want to mine the earth till I find you/ and kiss your noble skull/ and un-shroud you, and return you” (75, quoted in English in the original). The narrator is an experienced reader of poetry; her critical reading skills will be crucial to map out an ongoing, although not definite, cartography of border violence in the US, as will be done in the second section of this analysis ‘(What?)’.

Likewise, in Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains*, the narrator’s only possession at the time of his arrival at Christmas Island – the beginning of his imprisonment –

is a book of poetry by his friend, the Kurdish poet Sabir Haka: “[t]he only thing I own is inside The Friend Of The Blue Eyed Boy’s backpack”, he recounts, “[o]n the first trip, my backpack, which didn’t contain anything valuable, has drifted into the waves. But The Friend Of The Blue Eyed Boy has kept my book of poetry with him, the book of poetry that I love” (78). The speaker then specifies: “*After thirty years struggling with that theocracy known as Iran / After thirty years my lot in life was nothing / What else could I have taken with me besides a book of poetry?*” (78). As I have already stated, poetry, and more precisely the poetic reading of space, will play a key role in the (re)configuration of Manus Prison – not to mention that the text is partially written in free verse. In this opening section of ‘Part two’, I will first explore the personality of the two narrators, to then move on to their position on the telling of migration and border violence.

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No Friend begins on the road: “[t]wo trucks carry scared and restless passengers down a winding, rocky labyrinth” (1). Among the group of passengers, there is the narrator, who is telling the story while simultaneously experiencing it first-hand – “[f]or six hours I have sat without moving, leaning my back against the wooden wall, and listening to an old fool complain about the smugglers” (1). The setting and the plot are limited to the scope of his eyes: “a sky the colour of intense anxiety (…) a makeshift wall … constructed of cloth (…) The branches of trees above us sometimes cover the sky, sometimes reveal it, as we speed past” (1, 2); his point of view commanding narration from the first page. As a matter of fact, his watchful and perceptive eyes are the first, and likely the most important, feature to highlight from the narrator’s personality.

In the following subsection – let me remind you that chapters are divided into subsections, each covering a different topic, or scene – the description of the trucks’ journey shifts to recent memories of the dark period while he was hidden in Indonesia: “[i]n the three months I was in Jakarta’s Kalibata City and on Kendari Island, I would regularly hear news of boats that had sunk” (3). These memories allow the narrator’s innermost feelings and fears to unfold: “I always felt I would die in the place I was born, where I was raised, where I have spent my whole life until now” (4); memories that also let us know that the narrator’s portrait is not only about the passengers, but also about himself – blurred and inconsistent though this turns out to be.

In the next subsections of the first part, narration alternates between a present tense account of the passengers’ trip, and a sketch of the events in the narrator’s past that led him to board a vessel aiming for Australia. If I write ‘sketch’, it is because we never get to know the seemingly tragic events of his past clearly and precisely –they are as hidden from our eyes as his name is. In this sense, let us recall Boochani's words in 'A Disclaimer' regarding the obscurity of the characters' identities: "No detainee or refugee in this book is based on a specific individual, however detailed their stories. They are not individuals who are disguised. Their features are not facts. Their identities are entirely manufactured" ('A Disclaimer'). And nor is the narrator an individual who is "disguised", nor are his features "facts". Throughout the book, he deliberately avoids saying his name as well as the prisoners'.

All in all, some light is shone on his biography, when the speaker recounts: "*[f]or years I had pondered the mountains / For years I had dwelt on the war involving occupiers of the Kurdish homelands / A war against those who had divided Kurdistan between themselves /*" (70, 71). At this point in the plot, the narrator has already been rescued by the Indonesian fishing vessel, and transferred to the Australian warship, where he can finally have some rest from the urgency of the odyssey at sea. He then focuses his thoughts elsewhere, to his motherland Kurdistan: "[w]hen I was younger, I had wanted to join the Peshmerga", he begins, "I wanted to live my life away from cities" (71); he expresses a longing for the landscape of childhood. The incursion into "the years and years I contemplated finding protection within the mountains" (71) is however rather short; it finishes on the same subsection, coinciding with the story's main turning point, as "we have now reached Australia. Life has shed its love on us" (77) – a love that will soon turn out to be poisoned.

Although brief in comparison with the length of the text, the subsection on the narrator's Kurdish roots outlines the key idea that every refugee and/or detainee in this book has her/his own story, albeit all converging in the same boat, both metaphorically and literally; something essential to counteract the prison's logic in the second part of the text. The narrator's desire to strengthen his rootedness also stresses the idea that just as everyone's path is unique, so, too, everyone's perspective is unique. In this sense, it is noteworthy that collective figures like "passengers", "migrants", and of course "prisoners", tend to deprive, if not obliterate, the sense of personal identity.

From chapter five, the narrator, along with all the asylum seekers travelling on the boat, falls into the clutches of the Australian authorities: "[i]n that tightly confined cage there is nothing particular to look at, so these idiotic and superficial musings become commonplace", he notes shortly after landing, "[w]hen each person's number is called, they first have to strip to be body-searched with a device". For the local authorities, prisoners have no names, only numbers – "MEG45" (96) is the narrator's. "Slowly but surely I must get used to this number (…) I try to use my imagination to attribute some new meaning to this meaningless number. For instance: Mr MEG. But there are a lot of people like me [all the passengers on the boat are labelled in the same fashion, see page 124]" (96), the narrator recounts with a touch of irony. The use of irony will bring out the multiple meanings of words and expressions, calling into doubt the prison's terminology.

That said, neither the narrator's new name nor the new political order governing his life – The Kyriarchal System –stops him from continuing to write about his experience in Manus Prison, from a very humble and austere standpoint. For let us recall the speaker's words at his arrival to Christmas Island: "*A skeletal man with light-coloured eyes /Holding a soaking book of poetry / His feet held tightly in a pair of flip-flops / This is all there is*" (80). The "skeletal man with light-coloured eyes" will indeed become a careful and thorough observer of the detention regime, going unnoticed by the G4S guards, the prison's security officers, and the local Papus. Purely peaceful, the narrator avoids any hint of confrontation – not even during the revolt, in the final chapter, does he indulge in the use of violence.

The final major feature to be considered of Boochani's narrator is his apparent solitude. Although, as previously mentioned, he travels and is later detained on Manus Island with a group of refugees, his portrait does not at any point portray a single conversation or interaction. And yet he is never alone: Manus Prison is full of men, men all over the place; even saying 'salaam' ('hello' in Iranian) "is a massive headache" (164), as prisoners are constantly bumping into each other – the narrator wonders "[w]hat else could a prisoner desire other than a moment of silence, solitude, and to feel as though one were standing stripped naked in the middle of a lush jungle?" (128). Although the prisoners share the same space – he notes that "[t]here is no escape, not even one moment without seeing the presence of another person" (129) – the principle of The Kyriarchal System is to isolate individuals – and, paradoxically, he benefits from this isolation to carry out his research. Later, in section '(What?)', it will be argued that solitude allows him to observe and study the different elements of 'The Kyriarchal System' from an invisible standpoint which is somewhat reminiscent of a silent camera. The narrator is there, but no one notices him.

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As for the narrator in *Tell Me How It Ends*, she introduces herself from the opening page as "a volunteer interpreter" for undocumented children in the federal immigration court in New York (7). The fact that she chooses her role within the story, and most importantly, her position, will be the first important feature to highlight from her identity – unlike the narrator in Boochani's who is *forcibly* transferred to Manus Prison and there becomes a prisoner. According to the introduction made in the first section of the text, 'I.Border', she is a Mexican woman living and working in the United States, who is going through the process of applying for a green card with little success – an issue which will be solved as the plot moves on.

Introductions made, the narrator then recounts an event from her private life: with the arrival of summer 2014, she sets out on a family road trip "from Harlem, New York, to a town in Cochise County, Arizona, near the U.S.-Mexico border" (8). The destination is striking. On the one hand, the route, and her story, reproduces, and somehow rewrites, the quintessentially American road trip – consider, for instance, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), or Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971). On the other hand, it undoes the way of the thousands of Mexicans and Central Americans who, year after year, aim to reach the US borders, as she hears on the radio news – "[w]e are driving across Oklahoma in early July when we first hear about the wave of children, alone and undocumented, at the border" (12).

But if there is something revealing about the family trip, it is the narrator's rather privileged social position in the country, despite not having US citizenship. Unlike her undocumented compatriots who arrive on the top of *La Bestia*, she travels without hindrances, and by car; furthermore, she does not actually work, but volunteers in the highly expensive New York City. A green card is provided to 'aliens' with strong family ties or a good position in the labour market, or both. Many pages later, in 'IV. Community', she finally discloses her occupation: "[i]n my first semester teaching at Hofstra University, I was assigned a class called, somewhat blandly, Advanced Conversation" (91). A lecturer of Spanish, she holds higher education qualifications, most probably in the humanities, which explains her outstanding research and reading skills – as well as her eligibility for a green card[35]. As will be elaborated in the next section of this *mémoire*, her outstanding reading and research skills will be crucial in the cartography of the US border regime. The narrator of *Tell Me How It Ends* is a reader and a writer above all.

That said, "a volunteer interpreter" (7), as mentioned above, outlines not only the role of the narrator within the story, but also her position. This point begs thorough consideration. To begin with, her role as an interpreter of Spanish to English should be read not only as being restricted to language but more widely, as an interpreter of the Latinx culture to the US culture. In this sense, she is neither fully with the Spanish whose speech she translates, nor fully with the English; as an interpreter she wanders between two languages, which are also two ways of looking at the world – and unlike the monologue of Boochani's narrator, she does interact with many other characters, revealing a polyphony of voices and identities. But as she states in the first page, "nothing is ever that simple" (7); it might happen that "in translation the phrase loses some of its meaning" (88), as, for instance, when she tries to explain the phrase "de Guatemala a Guatepeor" to an English-speaking audience in court (88). It will therefore be worth considering to what extent the children's stories might lose some of their original meaning when translated to English – if ever they had a meaning – or the intake questionnaire when translated to Spanish –if it ever had a meaning to its listeners, of course.

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[35] In an interview with poet Javier Zamora, Luiselli notes "[in *Tell Me How It Ends* I] had to disclose a more clear political stance as well as a positionality of where I'm writing from. I'm a member of the Hispanic community but also I am a member that came here to study a PhD but didn't come here undocumented" (Zamora, 2019).

It is difficult to write about the narrator in *Tell Me How It Ends* and not think of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) – the now-classic essay on the Texas-US Southwest / Mexican border – when she writes: "I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean/ where the two overlap / a gentle coming together / at other times and places a violent clash / (…) 1,950 mile-long open wound / dividing a *pueblo*, a culture / (…) This is my home / this edge of / barbwire" (Anzaldúa, 1,3, italics in the original). As a proud Mexican living in the US for many years, the narrator is on the halfway site described by Anzaldúa, "at the edge where earth touches ocean", neither fully here nor fully there; dwelling instead in the in-between space of a *mestiza* – "*En 1521*", writes Anzaldua half in Spanish half in English, "*nació una nueva raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood, a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings" (5, italics in the original).

(What?) Mapping Voices: Towards a Cartography of US Border-Policing Violence

('Focalization' is defined by Mieke Bal as "the relation between the vision and that which is 'seen', perceived" (142). According to Bal, three questions should frame any analysis on 'focalization' and the 'focalizer' – the character who sees, but who is not necessarily the narrator. These questions are: "1 – What does the character focalize: what is it aimed at? 2 – How does it do this: with what attitude does it view things? 3 – Who focalizes it: whose focalized object is it?" (150). This and the next section draw for the most part on Bal's 'focalization' to explore the 'What?' of the two texts – what is told, and what is seen in the texts. However, the definitions are porous and imprecise, and restricting the analysis to one concept is limiting; therefore, I will also consider spatialization, point of view or literary geography, among others.)

In *Lost Children Archive*, the fictional novel based on *Tell Me How It Ends*, Valeria Luiselli writes, "[s]ound and space are connected in a way much deeper than we usually acknowledge. Not only do we come to know, understand, and feel our way in space through sounds, which is the more obvious connection between the two, but we also experience space through the sounds overlaid through it" (Luiselli, 2019, 39). Sounds order, disorder, and reorder the narrative space; mapping sounds, and in particular voices, is one of Luiselli's hallmarks along with the disruption and dislocation of the narrative structure[36]. Luiselli's soundscape in *Tell Me* begins with the intake questionnaire abruptly erupting into the opening sentence: "'[w]hy did you come to the United States?'" (7). The quotation is followed by a brief clarification: "[t]hat's the first question on the intake questionnaire for unaccompanied children. The questionnaire is used in the federal immigration court in New York where I started working as a volunteer interpreter in 2015" (7). As "a volunteer interpreter", the narrator interviews and translates from Spanish to English the words of dozens of undocumented children; or, to put it more bluntly, she focalizes the questionnaire, reading it to children aloud, and then writing their answers into the blank spaces. That said, the questionnaire is not the only 'object' focalized by the narrator – although it is probably the most visible and voiced. The "children's stories" along with many other sources are also focalized, the ensemble of focalized 'objects' mapping a transnational and polyphonic cartography of US border-policing violence. This section aims at exploring and ordering the different components of the essay's soundscape.

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The intake questionnaire and the children's stories are not, chronologically speaking, the first voices the narrator enters into a dialogue with. On the family trip from New York to Cochise County, she "first hear[s] about the wave of children arriving, alone and undocumented, at the border" (12). As the family goes deeper into the country, they listen and read more and more about "the wave of children": "[w]e collect local newspapers, which pile on the floor of our car, in front of my copilot seat", the narrator recounts, "[w]e do constant, quick online searches and tune in to the radio every time we can catch a signal" (13). Significantly, the "family trip" – the geography, the stops, the landscape, the meaning of going from one place to another – symbolizes the thread of texts and voices woven, unwoven and interwoven by the narrator, a thread which in narratology is named 'intertextuality', a term coined by Mikhail Bakhtin[37].

The thread is eclectic as much as it is personal, not following political or national demarcations of any kind. It ranges from a conversation between a waitress and her customer in the remote town of Roswell, New Mexico, to discussions on the narrator's seminar at Hofstra

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[36] The narrative structure is explored in section '(Why? and Where?)' of this second part.

[37] "The most widespread term Bakhtin's work offered is 'intertextuality.' This term refers to the quotation, in a text, of another text. Such quotations are not always marked as such; in fact, according to the philosophy of language Bakhtin articulated, any discourse is always already a patchwork of quotations. As far as discourse is concerned, there is nothing new under the sun", Mieke Bal writes (64).

University; from the mother of the two girls from Guatemala who "responds for the girls, filling holes, explaining things, and also telling her own version of the story" (56), to the anonymous judge who states "the basic facts" in court (58); from Miguel Hernandez's "Elegy" poem to "the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed after the war, in which Mexico lost half her territory to the United States" or the "President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act" (17). 'Intertextuality' refers to the relationship between different texts and discourses, the shaping of a text's meaning by another text, an ancient form of weaving and unweaving, which is profoundly indifferent to spatial and temporal boundaries.

Many of these sources are listed at the end (pages 109–119), but their presence and fuction within the text are worth considering. To begin with, most of them are only soundlessly evoked or referred to. The silence is notorious, for example, in the following excerpt: while "driving across Oklahoma", the narrator notes, "[n]othing is clear in the initial coverage of the situation ["the wave of children arriving, alone and undocumented, to the border"] – which soon becomes known, more widely, as an immigration crisis, though others will advocate for the more accurate term 'refugee crisis'" (12). Who are these "others"? And why does the narrator avoid saying their names? The same omission is repeated every time the narrator provides any information: "[d]eaths and disappearances: though it's impossible to establish an actual number, *some sources* estimate that, since 2006, around 120,000 migrants have disappeared in their transit to Mexico" (26, italics are mine), or some sections later: ""[f]rom October 2013 to the moment the crisis was declared in June 2014, the total number of child migrants detained at the border approached 80,000 (…) Later, in the summer of 2015, *it became known* that between April 2014 and August 2015, more than 102,000 unaccompanied children had been detained at the border" (37,38, italics are mine). The data is given in a report from the Migration Policy Institute by policy analyst Sarah Pierce, but it remains anonymous in the text. There seems to be a deliberate intention to not cite the sources, to not provide the names of journalists, researchers, or policy analysts who have a voice and an opinion on the crisis; to obscure them from everyone's eyes, as, too, are the children's stories obscured.

Following Luiselli's invitation to enter into a dialogue with her book[38], it is important to reflect on two crucial points. First, the fact that while the sources are somehow obscured, the intake questionnaire is fully exposed, standing naked and unprotected before our eyes. Second, that the intake questionnaire is not listed in the 'Sources' – and it is worth noting that it is also entirely missing from internet searches. It seems futile to enter into the debate of whether or not the questionnaire is authentic, but something here is clear: sources can either be transparent or obscured, voiced or silenced. The choice entails a world of difference in the cartography of violence in the US-Mexico border. After all, mapping is all about choosing, but also about deliberately omitting, or 'forgetting', geographical features – or, as in this case, voices.

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[38] Let us remember Luiselli's words quoted in 'Part One': "[Space] has to do with the type of document my work draws on … Leaving traces seems to me a way of inviting someone to sit and enter into a dialogue with a book, to communicate in a more active way".

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It is therefore no accident that 'I. Border' opens with the first question of the intake questionnaire. As stated in 'Part One', many of the narrator's points stem from the questionnaire, which makes it the text's 'hypotext'. 'Hypotext' is defined by Gerard Genette in *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* as " toute relation unissant un texte B (hypertexte) à un texte antérieur A (hypotexte) sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire" (Genette, 5)[39]. The relationship between *Tell Me How It Ends* and the questionnaire can be also labelled "*métatextuelle*", "la relation, dite "de commentaire", qui unit un texte à un autre texte dont il parle, sans nécessairement le citer"[40] (10), in Genette's terms. However, the relationship between the two texts – the essay and the questionnaire – does not fit neatly into either of the two Genettian boxes. To begin with, the narrator is neither re-writing a story by following the intake questionnaire – it is even doubtful whether the questionnaire should be considered a proper narrative text[41] – nor does she simply furnish it with comments, as Genette's definition of '*métatextualité*' presupposes. Far from it: she is reading the questionnaire, or, to put it more bluntly, she is finding meaning in the words, paying close attention to how the questions are phrased, the word choice and tone, and, above all, the order that they follow; reading it not only to the children – aloud and in Spanish – but also in quest for meaning.

Throughout the first three sections, the narrator critically addresses the order and content of the questions, while also stressing the silences and omissions – interestingly, the last question is formulated on page 89, near the end of 'III. Home'. "[To question number one] [t]hen comes question number two in the intake questionnaire: "When did you enter the United States?"", she notes shortly after the beginning, "[m]ost children don't know the exact date (…) They 've come all this way looking for– for what, exactly? The questionnaire doesn't make these other enquiries. But it does ask for precise details: "When did you come to the United

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[39] "[Hypertextuality refers to] any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (which I shall, of course, call the *hypotext*), upon which it is attached in a manner that is not that of commentary".

[40] "The relationship, known as 'feedback', between a text and another which it speaks about, without necessarily quoting it".

[41] Mieke Bal defines narrative text as "a text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof" (5).

States?" (13). Although the narrator's points might stem from the questionnaire, her narrative scope is not restricted to the 40-question list. In other words, she not only focalizes the questionnaire, but many other voices as well. In this sense, one of Luiselli's most remarkable achievements is her ability to see beyond the 'hypotext' and fix her gaze upon the "other enquiries" which are not formulated in the questionnaire – and which are indeed the questionnaire's real blank spaces.

The questionnaire is gradually introduced, as if the narrator were considering the sequence of events in a plot, or the different stanzas of a poem: "[questions] [f]ourteen, fifteen, and sixteen open a window into how the migration of children is reorganizing and redefining the traditional family structure (…) Seventeen and eighteen refer to family members who might act as sponsors (…) Questions thirty-five and thirty-six: Any problems with your government in your home country? If so, what happened? (48, 49, 74). Questions unfold piece by piece, providing a sort of storyline – a sequential order to be followed. However, as will be seen in section '(Why? and Where?)', the more the narrator gets into the questionnaire, the less clear its order seems to be. In a certain parallel, the same can be argued about the structure of the essay which is divided into four sections – 'I. Border', 'II. Court', 'III. Home' and 'IV. Community'. Superficially, the sections reflect the "inscrutable haiku" written on one of the walls of the screening room (41), but it is worth raising the question of whether they are a parody of the inevitable narrative chaos the children's stories are immersed in. All in all, the "inscrutable haiku" proves to be very useful to orientate you/us the reading of this *mémoire*, and that is something worth noting as well.

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The intake questionnaire is intended to pave the way for undocumented children in the US – but the questions are too complicated. Many of the children to whom the narrator asks the 40-question list are not old enough to attend high school. Their answers are thus insufficient and inadequate, the children lacking the knowledge to connect their experiences with times, places, or political endeavours; children cannot look back in retrospect and put their past experiences into words. Theirs is not the adults' world, and it simply cannot be told in adult's terms – or even worse, in legal terms. "I hear words, spoken in the mouths of children", the narrator relates in the first paragraph, "threaded in complex narratives. They are delivered with hesitance, sometimes distrust, always with fear" (7), the opposite features of the language of bureaucracy.

"Why did you come to the United States", the narrator asks to two little Guatemalan girls, "I don't know", one of them replies (55); "And where did you cross the border?", the narrator continues, "I don't know.", "Texas? Arizona?", she tries again, "Yes! Texas Arizona"

(56). Needless to add that key phrases such as ‘child labour’ or ‘gang violence’ are entirely unknown to the children – questions 27, 28 and 29 are related to work, and question 34 with gangs and crime[42]. The narrator then has “to transform [the answers] into written words, succinct sentences, and barren terms” (7). The transformation of the children’s answers into a narrative implies writing, although writing not only in the sense of the mere “commitment of the word to space”, as Walter Ong beautifully defines it (Ong, 7), but also with the meaning of creating a narrative, of shaping a world on a blank sheet. The term ‘stories’, though often related to the fuzzy realm of fiction, is worth considering because is it not in fiction where anything is possible? Therefore, is the term ‘stories’ a form of escape, or an alternative route, from the bureaucratic language – i.e., the intake questionnaire – that these dramatic journeys are usually reduced to? If so, are the “children’s stories” a counter-narrative of migration? Clearly, the intake questionnaire and the children’s stories are in opposition to each other, the Q&A a metaphor of a wall of division.

“The children’s stories”, the narrator notes on the opening page, “are always shuffled, stuttered, always shuttered beyond the repair of a narrative order” (7). Two children’s stories are partially written by the narrator – perhaps they were invented – and certainly they were made[43]. These are the story of Manu from Tegucigalpa who fled home after his best friend was murdered by a local gang, and the story of the two little girls from Guatemala whose grandmother sewed their mother’s phone number onto their dresses. If I say partially, it is because we never get the complete story, but rather little pieces, the main events seeking to be obscured from the bureaucratic system – and from the eyes of everyone, the reader included[44]. In this sense, it is noteworthy that, while the intake questionnaire is entirely exposed from its first to the last question, the children’s stories are “shuffled, stuttered, always shuttered beyond the repair of a narrative order”. Let us begin with “the first story” the narrator heard:

> I recall every nuance of the first story I heard and translated in court. Perhaps only because it was the story of a boy I encountered again, a few months later, and have ever since kept close contact with. Or perhaps because it’s a story condensed in a very specific, material detail that has continued to haunt me: a piece of paper the boy pulled from his pocket at the end of the interview. (42)

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[42] The 40-question list can be found in ‘Annex’.

[43] During her speech at the 2021 Dublin Literary Awards, Valeria Luiselli noted that “the word fiction comes from *fingere* which means to shape, or form, and originally to mould something out of clay. Fingere implies *the action of making, rather than inventing*. It’s not inventing something that it’s not true, it’s giving shape to what was already there. Fiction requires a combination of insights, hindsights and foresights” (Dublin City Literature, 3:27, italics are mine).

[44] Note the parallel with Boochani when in ‘A Disclaimer’ he notes that “[c]hanging details such as hair colour, eye colour, age, nationality, name … we have not considered this sufficient to ensure that those who are vulnerable within the system have been adequately obscured” (‘A Disclaimer’, Boochani). In ‘Acknowledgements’ Luiselli writes: “The stories told in this essay are true. All names of the children I have interviewed in court, as well as specific facts about their biographical information and that of their sponsors, have been changed in order to protect them” (107).

This is an excerpt from 'II. Court' in which the narrator recounts her first day of work at the New York immigration court, when she had access to the intake questionnaire for the first time: "[b]lindly, we simply followed all the questions on the intake questionnaire, one by one, and translated the answers" (39). The narrator recalls the first story she "heard and translated in court", "the story of a boy I encountered again". However, she does not say a word about the story, nor about the interview itself, as all her attention is focused on "a piece of paper" that "the boy pulled from his pocket". This "piece of paper" foreshadows the interview. The "very specific, material detail" (42) haunts the narrator ever since "with the strange power of symbols" (43), and will also go on to haunt the plot. The "piece of paper" is then revisited over and over: "a complaint filed by a boy hoping to produce a change in his life" (43) is also "a road map of a migration" (43), and further, legal evidence to sustain the boy's case in trial. The narrator notes, "thanks to the material evidence Manu has of his statements – the folded slip of paper – The Door was able to find a large firm willing to take his case pro bono" (80). The story of Manu returns later to the plot, because, as the narrator explains, "[the story] lives with me now, grows in me, all its details clear in my mind and constantly revisited" (70):

> This is how it starts. A boy and I are seated at one end of a long mahogany table. It is obvious that both of us are new to the scenario, both still uncomfortable with reducing a story to the blank spaces of the questionnaire.
> First I fill in biographical details. Next to "name", "age" and "nationality", I write: Manu López, sixteen years old, Honduras. Then, next to the words "guardian", "relationship", and "current residence", I write: Alina López, aunt, 42, Port Street, Hempstead, Long Island, NY. I look at the two questions that float halfway down the page: "Where is the child's mother?", "Father?" Manu answers with a shrug, and I write: ? and ?
> Why did you come to the United States? (70)

At this point of the plot, halfway through 'III. Home', the narrator has already interviewed dozens of children and is now very familiar with the intake questionnaire and the US legal system. Yet the story that consumes her is still the story she "first heard in court" (70), which comes back to her "insistently, with the strange power of symbols" (43). That said, only a few details are disclosed. First, the narrator delineates the beginning – "This is how it starts" – policing the boundaries between the first level of narration – her own story and the description of the bureaucratic labyrinth – and the children's stories, which are thereby placed at a different level of narration. The same line is drawn in the story of the girls from Guatemala: "[m]y daughter often follows up on the stories she half-hears. There is one story that obsesses her, a story I only tell her in pieces and for which I have not yet been able to offer a real ending. *It* *begins* with two girls in the courtroom" (55, italics are mine). The "children's stories" are embedded narratives, also called frame narratives, within the primary text[45].

All in all, the narrator never tells the complete story, only fragments or little pieces – perhaps no one, not even she, knows the full story. The story of Manu, the story of the two girls, even the story of the narrator's daughter return insistently to the plot, but we always get the impression of missing out on many events. For example, in 'IV. Community', Manu is living in Nassau County, New York, where he attends a local school, and, presumably, is no longer entangled within the bureaucratic labyrinth. The last time the narrator had mentioned him was during the meeting with a law firm, when Manu had asked for free cookies while the lawyers were analyzing his case. What happened in between? The narrator does not tell us, and neither does she tell the end of the story, always unable "to offer a real ending" (55):

> Tell me how it ends, Mamma, my daughter asks me.
> I don't know.
> Tell me what happens next.
> Sometimes I make up an ending, a happy one. But most of the time I just say:
> I don't know how it ends yet. (90)

Significantly, 'Mamma' does not plot. She only offers beginnings[46].

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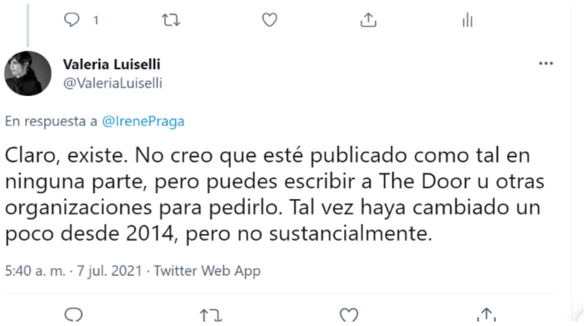
Post Scriptum: I asked Valeria Luiselli on *Twitter* whether the questionnaire for undocumented children was invented or not, and she answered (Luiselli, *Twitter*)[47]:


Valeria Luiselli
@ValeriaLuiselli

En respuesta a @IrenePraga

Claro, existe. No creo que esté publicado como tal en ninguna parte, pero puedes escribir a The Door u otras organizaciones para pedirlo. Tal vez haya cambiado un poco desde 2014, pero no sustancialmente.

5:40 a. m. · 7 jul. 2021 · Twitter Web App

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[45] Defined by Bal as: "[w]hen the texts do not interfere, but are clearly separated (…) This is most obvious in so-called frame narratives: narrative texts in which at the second or third level a complete story is told" (52).

[46] The question of Mamma's beginnings, and, more widely, the structure of the plot will be considered further in section '(Why?)'.

[47] "Of course, it exists. I don't think it is published anywhere, but you can write to The Door or any other organization to ask for it. Maybe it will have changed a bit from 2014, but not substantially".

(What?) Watching: Ways of Seeing and Types of Eyes

(This section also draws from Mieke Bal's concept of 'focalization', highlighting the two significant 'objects' the narrator of No Friend *focalizes in his account: the journey and the prison system.)*

In *No Friend*, chapter five, "A Christmas (Island) Tale / A Stateless Rohingya Boy Sent Away to Follow the Star of Desire", marks a turning point in the descriptions of the scenes, as well as, of course, in the plot. Up until then, the narrator has been travelling with a group of asylum seekers, monitoring the scene before his eyes from the outset: first in the trucks, then during the odyssey, the subsequent rescue, and on the various boats. Although everyone was watching everyone – something inevitable within the space of the few square meters inside the truck and the boats – no external eyes were observing them. This, however, abruptly changes as they land on Christmas Island, Australia's external territory in the Indian Ocean, where "surveillance cameras" gaze at them: "*A cage / High walls / Wire fencing /*", the speaker enumerates, describing the different parts of the prisoners' "cage", "*Electronic doors / CCTV cameras / A cage – high walls – wire fencing – electronic doors – CCTV cameras / Surveillance cameras gazing at twenty individuals /*" (81). The "twenty individuals", the narrator then recounts, are, apparently, being constantly watched and controlled; even when "[the Australian officials] allow [the prisoners] to go to the toilets. The toilets also have CCTV cameras" (84). If I write 'apparently', it is because, significantly, the narrator is the only focalizer in the narrative. Thereby, everything is seen and told from his perspective. As already mentioned in the first part, neither the Australian officers who "allow" the prisoners to relieve themselves, nor the anonymous individuals controlling and monitoring the CCTV cameras have agency, nor a voice in the text. In this section, I will explore the narrator's different ways of seeing, and the types of eyes doing so, by comparing two descriptions before and after his detention. This is a crucial point in the design of a 'poetics of counter-surveillance' in Manus Prison, as will be argued in section '(Where?)'.

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To begin with, the narrator's ability to set what is named but also unnamed, what is seen but also unseen – or deliberately forgotten, or hidden – in the scene before his eyes, is striking – an essential point which draws a certain parallel with Luiselli's cartography of border violence. The plot in *No Friend* begins inside the trucks heading for the unknown. The trucks' interiors are concisely described by the narrator, as if he wanted to give an account of every small detail of the journey: the distribution of the passengers; the "makeshift wall" separating the space where children can relieve themselves "in empty water bottles"; "the looming shadow of fear" (2) preluding the voyage across the ocean. The scene takes place in a suffocatingly tiny space in which people crowd, and everyone is forcibly watching each other – just as closely and thoroughly as they watch each other in prison. Interestingly, the narrator notes that "[n]o-one pays any attention when a few arrogant men go behind the screen and throw away the urine-filled bottles" (2). The "arrogant men" are the smugglers who drive the passengers from Kalibata City to the beach, where a boat is waiting to take them on to Australia. The smugglers are nameless, as opposed to the passengers whose names are told one by one in the next subsection: "[a] young man and his girlfriend, Azadeh, are riding in the first truck. They are accompanied by our mutual acquaintance The Blue Eyed Boy" (4, 5), and later adding 'The Friend Of The Blue Eyed Boy' (11), 'The Penguin' (13), and 'The Toothless Fool' (13).

In chapter two, the journey on the trucks is followed by the boarding on the boat: "[t]here's a deafening commotion in the bridge", the narrator begins, "[a] conflict between frenzied men vying for a place to sit has reached fever pitch. The Toothless Fool and The Penguin have laid themselves down next to the captain's chair" (13). Here, again, whereas some characters are deliberately named, or rather re-named[48], it is worth considering the impersonal and non-accidental reference to 'the captain', who is referred to by his/her role in the scene, but not by his/her name. The aesthetic and political function of this naming becomes more evident from chapter five, coinciding with the beginning of the narrator's imprisonment – for instance, with the 'G4S guards', and the 'Papus', who are always referred to under the label of collective figures. As translator Tofighian notes in the epilogue, "[c]onceptually, [Boochani] owns the prison" – and, paradoxically, he also owns the system – at least narratively.

The first two stages of the journey allow the reader to notice the narrator's incisive and ubiquitous eyes. "In another corner of the truck", he notes in the first chapter, "is a Sri Lankan family with an infant child. The passengers are mainly Iranian, Kurdish, Iraqi, and you can see they are fascinated by the presence of a Sri Lankan family among them" (6). Everything is new, and therefore worth noting: "down at the end of the boat *I can see* it's a struggle to find a suitable place to sit (…) With the help of the weak light from the lamp fixed above the captain's head, *I can see* dozens of exhausted people sleeping alongside each other" (14, 15, italics are mine). With the eyes of the narrator setting and delimiting the spatial frame, his point of view commands narration, which is all about 'I can see this', 'I can see that'; a sequence of scenes orders the narration. The scenes are unique; as the plot moves forwards, the different settings of the journey are left behind. Let us consider how he describes the boat:

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[48] Let us remember Boochani's words in 'A Disclaimer', "[detainees or refugees in this book] are composite characters: a collage drawn from various events, multiple anecdotes, and they are often inspired by the logic of allegory, not reportage" ('A Disclaimer').

> The sky is looking brighter. Little by little, golden glimmers of sun appear on the distant horizon. The captain's assistant shifts back and forth to the engine room, and a few others are standing around.
> I can see The Friend Of The Blue Eyed Boy sitting right at the end of the boat. He is like a picture, the pride of youth. Azadeh's head rests on his lap as he looks out at the waves and all the exhausted faces around him. A young guy with a ponytail is sitting next to a kind of window frame in one of the sleeping quarters. His wife sleeps right beside him. He watches The Friend Of The Blue Eyed Boy gripping the edge of the boat with both hands. The Blue Eyed Boy stands next to the captain, busy eating a bag of red apples. A young man – a robust muscular guy – is awake in the stern. His wife and child rest their heads on one of his large arms. (15)

The narrator describes the scene as it unfolds, at a very precise moment: when "[t]he sky is looking brighter", and "[l]ittle by little, golden glimmers of sun appear on the distant horizon". The day is dawning, enabling the narrator to see the scene before his eyes more clearly. He then recounts what he can see, composing the scene step by step: "[t]he captain's assistant shifts back and forth to the engine room (…) I can see The Friend Of The Blue Eyed Boy…", his eyes moving gradually, seeing one detail at a time. In this sense, as the narrator posits near the end, "one cannot command each of one's eyes to observe two opposite directions, one cannot watch both sides of the road at the same time" (329). His two eyes then focused on the same direction, he pulls the different details of the scene apart: "The Friend Of The Blue Eyed Boy", "Azadeh", "a young guy with a pony tail", "The Blue Eyed Boy", "a muscular guy", and "his wife and child". As a matter of fact, the description of the scene certainly draws a balance between the scene as a whole – the boat crossing the ocean – and the sum of its details – each and every one of the passengers, the ship's crew, and the setting. This same balance between the whole and the details will be maintained in the spatial descriptions of 'Manus Prison'.

All in all, the most remarkable point of the boat's description is the narrator's inconspicuous position inside the scene, which is reminiscent of a film-camera. With his eyes and body placed at the same height as the characters in the scene, he silently stands unnoticed among the crowd, monitoring everything. The 'poetics of counter-surveillance', as I like to refer to the narrator's scene-configuring-vision, will be a crucial point as he falls into the clutches of the Australian authorities. Although the narrator, dispossessed of his phone and, most importantly, of his rights and fate, then claims to be "frightened by the journalists; I am frightened by the cameras they hold" (91), he also keeps a secret: his eyes capture everything, as if they were a camera too.

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The first scenes unfold, fast and sequentially, at the same time as the narrator is experiencing the events. However, the sense of presentness, which gives the impression of time going by quickly, abruptly changes as he arrives on Manus Island. He relates landing on the island: "It is afternoon. The minibus has arrived somewhere that seems to be Manus Prison. A sizable area with large white tents set up in the centre, and fences that besiege the prison from every side. A melancholic silence. Not even a bird flies past this place" (104). These are fences that will also besiege his time, and thus the flow of his life's journey. In the limbo of the prison, the clock and calendar soon disappear: the last reference to the time elapsed since he landed on Manus is located in the opening sentence of chapter six, "[o]ne month has passed since I was exiled to Manus. I am a piece of meat thrown into an unknown land; a prison of filth and heat" (121). Time in Manus Prison goes by differently[49]. Time is all a matter of routine, and routine is largely a matter of queuing:

> *A twisted, interlocking chain of hungry men/*
> *Bodies mutate under the burning sun/*
> *Heads in an oven fired by the sun/*
> *Undergoing sickening transformations/*
> *A long line of men of different heights, weights, ages and colours.*" (189)

The opening lines of chapter eight, "Queuing as Torture: Manus Prison Logic / The Happy Cow", witness the daily scene of a "*chain of hungry men*" lining up for food "*under the burning sun*". The lines are followed by a long section describing the "*long line of men*" (pages 189-199) queuing for food within the carceral system – and who also queue for cigarettes, for the toilette, or for making a weekly call, as the narrator details in later chapters. In Manus Prison nothing is new. The scenes there lack the freshness and sense of adventure of the journey: the narration becomes dry and circular, as the narrator's eyes look at the same scene over and over. As the speaker notes in the same section, "*[t]he spectacle of the prison queue is a raw and palpable reinforcement of torture*" (193). Queuing commands the prisoners' time while simultaneously reinforcing the presence of the "G4S" prison guards; in the narrator's terms,

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[49] The journey and the prison, which are two analogous forms of experiencing space and time, are compared in the next section, '(Why?)'.

"[the G4S guards monitoring the queue] are like shepherds guiding a herd of sheep down an obvious path, a path they are following anyway" (193). Yet the narrator is not following the "obvious path" anyway; instead, he has been critically observing the queue as an object of inquiry which begs thorough consideration, and he now possesses a deep knowledge of its logic. The poetics of "witnessing the queue" (192) can be read as a form of counter-surveillance. Here, the purpose of watching has radically changed: while on the journey it was aimed at recounting the passengers' deeds, in prison it seeks to unmask the forms of power and oppression.

The queues for "dirty, poor-quality food" are controlled, according to the narrator, by "a few grim and brainless G4S guards", who only let five prisoners at a time in the dining area (190). "*The logic of five /*" (191), as the speaker refers to the number, is dictated by "The Manus Prison Logic" which, in the narrator's terms, "is about domination (…) Every mind is caught up in a process, a process that has become normalized. *A domesticating process*" (190, italics in the original). In the section covering pages 189-199, the narrator thoroughly documents and analyzes the "*domesticating process*" from "the first stage", "at the end of the line – a place covered by an awning, a place from which no one can tell where the queue ends" (191), to the dining area, drawing attention to the different elements composing the queue: "the shepherds", "the herd of sheep" and particularly "the obvious path" (193). Nothing escapes his eye for detail, something remarkable considering that queuing is a "reinforcement of torture":

> The queue is a replica of a factory production line. Total discipline. Calculated and precise. The first stage is at the end of the line (…) The queue makes a turn behind the rooms occupied by Sri Lankans. After at least half an hour, one arrives at the bend and realises that the queue extends for another thirty metres (…) Arriving at the bend is an achievement, but the prisoner leaves the shelter of the shade and enters the section under the burning sun (…) The queue forms parallel to the wall, in total sun. Hot and merciless (…) Throughout the line a few G4S guards supervise. (191, 192, 193)

From this excerpt it is worth noting, first and foremost, that, unlike the description analyzed previously – the journey on the boat – the narrator is not describing the scene in first-person. Rather he shifts to an impersonal, "calculated and precise", third-person narrative. This shifting allows him to detach himself from the scene, giving the impression of observing it from the outside, and thus considering all the elements involved: the prisoners like himself, but also the G4S guards, the setting, and more broadly the architecture of "The Manus Prison Logic"[50]. The narrator is no longer relating the events with the same sense of urgency and immediacy of the scenes on the boat. Rather, the events in the prison do not follow any sequential order and result from the narrator's observation over time – as the speaker notes in relation to the queue, the narrator is "*Just one frail fox / Staring at that queue / From afar / Staring at the queue / Over and over / And over again*" (198). In this sense, the section is not about the description of *a* queue, but *the* queue which, day after day, the prisoners are forced to join – as the opening sentence remarks, "[d]ays in the prison begin with the commotion of long queues – long, pulverising queues. Hungry prisoners rush out of their sweaty, sticky beds early in the morning, and like bees they swarm the tent that makes up the dining area" (189). "Bees" whose present day resembles yesterday and tomorrow, but also "bees" whose eyes can critically describe the "factory production line" in which their days are being imprisoned, *producing* a counter-narrative of the detention centre.

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[50] Spatial descriptions are elaborated on in section '(Where?)' of this second part.

(Why?) Trapped in Limbo; (Re)Enacting the Border

(Following Mikhail Bakhtin, Mieke Bal does not talk about 'plot', but about 'fabula'. Bal writes "A story *is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A* fabula *is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An* event *is the transition from one state to another state … The distinction [between story and fabula] is based upon the difference between the sequence of events and the* way in which *these events are presented" (5, 6, italics in the original). In this section which explores the plot, the timeline and sequencing in* No Friend*, I'd rather use 'plot' instead of 'fabula'.)*

The '19th of July Law' of 2013 passed by the Australian government had dramatic consequences for Behrouz Boochani and the other passengers travelling with him – the law states that asylum seekers without the required papers will be indefinitely detained in offshore detention centres. Confined for four years in Manus Prison, Boochani's journey to Australia seeking a better life turned out to be an unexpected nightmare, as he recounts in *No Friend but the Mountains*, the plot of which is divided into two clear parts: the first, the journey to Christmas Island, the second, the never-ending imprisonment on Manus Island. The detention marks a turning point in the plot, which profoundly disrupts the sequential ordering of events. From then on, time stands still; narration is predominantly descriptive, and the events are rather timeless – following no narrative order as they portray daily life in the prison, a routine similar to yesterday and tomorrow. Thereby, a strong sense of repetition sets the tone of the second part. This section aims at exploring, comparing, and contrasting the sequential ordering of the plot in the two parts of the story.

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The first four chapters depict the narrator's journey from somewhere in Indonesia to his arrival on Christmas Island. The journey depicts linearity from the very first subsection in chapter one – a chain where each event affects the next, and so on. In the first scene, the trucks are carrying the passengers "down a winding, rocky labyrinth [and] speed[ing] along a road surrounded by jungle" (1), the road projecting a line ahead. The scenes on the trucks are followed by one on the bridge which connects the shore with the boat on the "roaring ocean", and then the boat that will take the passengers to Australia. The plot moves forward with the boat which leaves behind the Indonesian shores. As the narrator then comments, "[i]t's daylight now and I see the boat has covered a large stretch – more like a small gulf – in a few hours, so far that the shore is out of sight. Only ships and fishing boats scatter the sanctuary of the sea" (17). As they move further, "the waves become more belligerent", and "the captain suggest[s] [they] should return" (17), to which the narrator reflects: "I can't contemplate going back to the coast, a place haunted by homelessness and the fear of starvation" (17); his eyes and thoughts looking ahead to the other side of the waters.

The weather worsening considerably, the narrator focuses on the urgency of saving the foundering boat before falling asleep, exhausted and hopeless. When he wakes up, "[t]here is a ship – standing only a few metres in the distance (…) now, full of sailors, restless with concern. We have been rescued; I mean we are on the brink of being rescued. Our vague, distant hope has become tangible" (34), a hope that materializes on a fishing boat which allows the journey to continue on its way. Events are told fast and sequentially as narration sticks to the narrator's present, every new scene overcoming the previous one which is urgently left behind to deal with the present – consider, for instance, the scenes on the boat or the rescue. A strong sense of presentness – meaning that events are taking place right here, right now – dominates the tone of these first chapters.

Once safely on the rescue boat, the narrator, reflecting on the events in the recent past, observes somewhat naively: "I realise I need time before these fragmented scenes order themselves. But one thing seems clear: at least this nightmare has come to a close, as I finally reach the last stage of my journey" (50). The journey, and thus the plot, continue to move forward step by step aiming for the passengers' destination – as the narrator observes, "men are sitting all over the deck of this boat, each carrying their unknown past, each one a survivor of a perilous journey, each now part of this gathering, all brought to this place by a single goal: the aim of arriving in the land known as Australia" (60). Yet the "land known as Australia" is still indefinitely far away; and despite having reached "the last stage of [his] journey", the narrator's foreseeable future seems rather blurred and unexplored. As he prophetically remarks on the same subsection, "[m]y full attention is on the faraway horizon. But (…) no matter how hard I focus, I can't see a thing on the horizon, that faraway border (…) I don't know exactly where we are out here – I have no idea how far we are from, say, Christmas Island. Who knows?" (60). Although the narrator can still see the horizon, both literally in the sea and metaphorically in the future ahead, something is gradually changing as he acknowledges being lost and disoriented in the midst of the ocean, preluding the dreadful events to come – he notes "[w]hen on the high seas, one is ignorant of geographical location. (…) I hate the moon. It tells me we are lost, that we are wandering displaced" (61). The narrator is aware that his journey is no longer navigating through safe waters, that he is now "wandering displaced", not in a line, but in circles, the centre of which is unknown to him.

From chapter five the future slips away from the horizon and, as stated in previous sections of this *mémoire*, is abruptly replaced by the "wire fences" and the "high walls" of "a tightly confined cage" (81) where the narrator is imprisoned at his arrival on Christmas Island, following the '19th of July Law' passed by the Australian government four days before. The journey has ended, and the passengers are now in "the land known as Australia", but paradise looks more like hell. The narrator recounts that "[w]e have now been in prison on Christmas Island for a whole month. It is hard to be a prisoner (…) I have no choice but to sit back down on that rigid chair again and just stare at the walls. I have always despised waiting, always despised glancing at whatever is around me, staring for hours while I wait for something worthless" (82, 88, 89). Waiting, as he repeats over and over in the following chapters, is a mechanism of torture – although the narrator is at the outset of his endless imprisonment and waiting "for something worthless" for hours is still a novelty.

Chapter five can be read as a chapter of passage between the fast rhythm of the journey's account and the thickness and emptiness of the years of imprisonment[51]. Events are still told in a sequential order: the narrator relates the first weeks in prison, the announcement of his exile to a place called "Manus Island", the departure at the airport under the watchful eye of a group of journalists and interpreters, the flight, and finally the arrival in Manus Prison. Significantly, the future is still an open question – as the speaker wonders, "*Is Manus really a sinister and hellish island? / Is there some connection between my damn tooth falling out and*

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[51] Felicity Plunkett writes about this chapter that "[i]f it were a piece of fiction, this intense account of being rescued would settle after its zenith. The writing recalls other stories of refugees' sea journeys to Australia, such as Nam Le's celebrated 'The Boat'. But Boochani's work is not fiction, and respite is illusory" (Plunkett).

the life that I will lead on Manus Island?" (103). Most importantly, there is still the idea of the future.

Once on Manus, the narration swerves into an entirely different direction, now limited to and by the wire fences besieging the prison. The spatial and narrative confinement is portrayed by the speaker at the beginning of chapter six: "*Days without any plans / Lost and disoriented / Minds still caught up in the waves of the ocean / Searching for peace of mind on new plains / But the prison's plains are like a corridor leading to a fighter's gym / And the smell of warm sweat everywhere is driving everyone insane*" (121). From then on, time stands still; the last reference to chronology is on the same page – "[o]ne month has passed since I was exiled to Manus" (121) – coinciding with a significant shift in the plot narrative, which is no longer about relating the events on a journey, but instead about describing the prison's architecture, both in spatial and ideological terms[52]. The narrator has fallen into the Manus Prison limbo.

A strong sense of emptiness defines the prisoners' days in Manus, as the narrator observes in chapter six, "[d]uring this period in the prison, there is nothing to occupy our time (…) Imagine a community of four hundred people, neglected in a boiling hot and filthy cage (…) For how long can they simply talk to each other? How many times can they walk up and down the same hundred-metre distance?" (126). Time becomes a ubiquitous obsession with no possible escape – it is portrayed by the speaker as: "*Killing time involves a simple trick / Reach out and hold another sunset / Another one of the thousand-colour Manusian-sunsets / Then reach out and hold another night / Another one of the dark island nights / A futile cycle… /*" (152). Repetition defines the "futile cycle" the narrator is confined in; prisoners replicate the same actions, the same gestures, the same gaze, over and over again – the cigarette queue, the malaria-treatment queue, 'salaam' and 'salaam' – giving the terrifying impression that time does not flow; every day, and every moment are all the same. "The distress caused by saying 'hi' is so intense", the narrator observes, "that when prisoners pass each other they pretend that they don't see anymore. It is like shadows, just passing each other. Cars with foggy windows in which one can only see directly ahead" (165).

That said, the narration hardly reflects the overwhelming repetition that day after day, hour after hour, besieges the prisoners' lives. All chapters and subsections deal with different issues – most cover points related to The Kyriarchal System while a few describe isolated events in the life of the prisoners like, for example, the rebellious dancing of "Maysam The Whore", which is "one of the only forms of power available to the prisoners" (136). The events discussed here, unlike in the first part of the plot, do not seem to follow any sequential order – which means that the subsections and chapters could be read independently from one another.

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[52] This point is elaborated on in section '(Where?), "This place is Australia itself"'.

The events told and the descriptions made in these chapters are, somehow, timeless. For instance, the first subsection of chapter seven is devoted to describing the interior of Fox Prison – "Fox Prison has six main corridors. Each one of these corridors consists of the following…" (149) – while the following subsection deals with The Kyriarchal System's exaggeration of the threat of malaria-carrying mosquitoes – the narrator notes "[w]ith time, with the changes experienced over days and months, the evidence is clear – it has been a lie" (157). Every subsection depicts a different way of re-enacting and describing the prison's system, showing a creative way of counteracting and challenging the prison's logic. As the narrator explains, "what the system is based on and is designed to accomplish" is "*To tame / To produce fragments of metal / A production line / A factory / We have become a replica of caged baby chickens / The prison has become a replica of a chicken coop / Modern / Industrial*" (210).

Near the end, in chapter eleven, the plot changes its course once and for all, returning to a sequential order in which one event affects the next, and so on. Coinciding with the visit of the nameless "Australian Minister for Immigration" (313) to the prison, "a young prisoner" has "slit his wrists with one those blue-handled razors" (316). Even though, as the narrator remarks, "scenes like this play out in Manus Prison over and over again" (316), its evocation results in a sequence of events: first, the narrator recounts that "another prisoner, two bathrooms down, creates another bloody scenario, much like the first" (320); then, the narrator and "The Smiling Youth" are sitting next to each other smoking a cigarette when they see all the G4S guards running "towards one location from all ends of the prison" (321) as another prisoner "has sliced into the tenderness of his neck" (322); lastly, "straight after the incident", a prisoner named "The Hero" "gets up on a chair to give an address in the mode of a leader" (324). The sequence of events end when the speaker/narrator finds out that "*Hamid, the smiling youth, dies*" (326, lowercase in the original)[53].

Symbolically, death is of paramount importance to the plot; the closing chapter, number twelve, in which the narrator vividly describes a revolt in the prison[54], also finishes with a death: that of "Reza", "The Gentle Giant" (356). "*We have to escape from the prison*", the speaker asserts at the beginning of the final chapter, "*Yes / A collective escape with the assistance of the officers / An escape under the orders of the prison wardens /*" (327, 328). For the first time since the narrator was imprisoned, prisoners are plotting, revolting against "an all-encompassing system of oppressive governmentality" (329). Notably, the narration reflects the big changes taking place; the plot line sticks to a clear sequential order while the pace quickens considerably – the first four years of imprisonment span chapters six to ten, while the last two chapters account for only two weeks' time. The narrator describes the war against The Kyriarchal System following "[t]wo weeks of peaceful protest" (333) – he notes that "for the first time the rules and regulations meant nothing – the system of oppression had been erased" (342). But soon "the Australians show their faces" (349) bloodily quashing the revolt and restoring The Kyriarchal System's order. The plot finishes with a message: "[t]hey had killed Reza. They had killed The Gentle Giant" (356); here, death is to be read as an allegory of the end of the journey; the end of the plot.

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[53] The death of Hamid Khazaei was reported by Australian and international media, see for example: Guardian staff, "Manus Island crisis: refugee collapses after reporting heart pain", https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/05/manus-island-crisis-refugee-collapses-after-reporting-heart-pain, 5 November 2017.

[54] The revolt was on 14 April 2017 (see the 'Introduction' of Michael Grewcock's 'Our lives is in danger': Manus Island and the end of asylum').

(Why? And Where?) The Intake Questionnaire: The Whole and Its Parts

(This section explores the structure of the plot in Tell Me How It Ends*. In an interview for the* Los Angeles Review of Books*, Luiselli observed, "I think and write spatially. But when I type in Word, it's a vertical novel" (Luiselli quoted in Zuckerman). Luiselli's understanding of plot is not only temporal – as the sequencing of events in a story – but also, and more importantly, spatial. Therefore, the questions 'why?' and 'where?' of* Tell Me *are inseparably linked.)*

In comparing the plots of the two texts, it is essential to underline that the two revolve around a journey. While the narrator in *No Friend but the Mountains* embarks on a boat aiming for Australia, the narrator of *Tell Me How It Ends* sets out on a revealing family trip from New York City to the US-Mexican border. Symbolically, the journey depicts a linear narrative – that is, the sequential ordering of events which brings closure to the story. In Luiselli's essay, linearity is portrayed, but also imposed, by the intake questionnaire for undocumented children. Quoted from the first to the last question, the questionnaire gives a sense of definition and clarity to the story, demarcating the limits and scope of the narrative.

The complexity in the narrative structure is, however, one of Luiselli's hallmarks – a feature influenced, perhaps, by the anglophone modernist novelists and poets to whom she devoted her PhD thesis in Columbia. The use of fragmentation and narrative disruption is one of the primary features of modernism, be it James Joyce, Virginia Woolf or H. D.. However, it is not restricted to the legendary community of writers who visited Sylvia Beach's bookshop, Shakespeare and Company, in the 1920s[55]. Julio Cortázar and the names of his irreverent and iconoclastic *cronopios* are also key to understanding Luiselli's play with spatial-temporal structure. At the beginning of *Rayela* (in English *Hopscotch*), Julio Cortázar writes in "Tablero de dirección" ("Table of direction"): "[a] su manera este libro es muchos libros, pero sobre todo es dos libros. El lector queda invitado *a elegir* una de las dos posibilidades siguientes"[56] (Cortázar, "Tablero de dirección", italics in the original). Asked in a recent interview for *Literary Hub* about the first book she fell in love with, Luiselli replied:

> *Hopscotch*, by Julio Cortázar. Probably because I was young, and it was the first time I read about love and sex and literature all in the same book. But also, because it is a brilliantly constructed puzzle that you have to learn how to read while you read it … *Hopscotch* revealed to me that literature was about playing (playing seriously and devotedly, the way children do). (Luiselli in *Literary Hub*)

Tell Me How It Ends is, among many other things, about children – and like children, we too can play with the book. This section seeks to address, and play with, the complexity of Luiselli's "constructed puzzle", both spatially and temporally, by closely examining the function of the intake questionnaire within the narrative structure. The questionnaire, I argue, can be read twofold: first, as an overall unit, in which case the last section 'IV. Community' can be considered as either an epilogue – a continuation from the margins – or an emancipation from the questionnaire, whose last point is formulated near the end of 'III. Home', and is therefore absent from 'IV. Community'. Or, second, it can be read question by question; fragment by fragment; beginning after beginning. This second reading challenges the sequencing of the story in a non-linear fashion, forcing the reader to read 'actively', piecing together the different components of the essay. Here, it is worth recalling Luiselli's words that were mentioned in 'Part One': "[n]o me interesan los libros que se encierran sobre sí mismos … Ir dejando huellas me parece una manera de invitar a una mente que se sienta a dialogar con ese libro, a dialogar de una manera más activa" (Cátedra Alfonso Reyes)[57].

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[55] Valeria Luiselli only started writing *Tell Me How It Ends* and *Lost Children Archive* when Sylvia Whitman, the current owner of Shakespeare and Company, offered to let her stay with her daughter in the small apartment above the bookshop. Luiselli relates the experience in 'Mirador', her former weekly column in *El País* (Valeria Luiselli, "Libreros", *El País*, https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/07/23/opinion/1469292221_622820.html, 25 July 2016), and in many interviews. See, for example, Agustina del Vigo, "Valeria Luiselli: más allá del género y de la forma", *ArteZeta*, https://artezeta.com.ar/valeria-luiselli-mas-alla-del-genero-y-la-forma/, 1 September 2020.

[56] "In its own way, this book is many books, but above all it is two books. The reader is invited *to choose* one of the following two options".

[57] "I'm not that interested in the books that withdraw into themselves … Leaving traces seems to me a way of inviting someone to sit and enter into a dialogue with a book, to communicate in a more active way".

The first question of the intake questionnaire sets the beginning of the story *in media res* (7). The narrator specifies that it is the questionnaire “used in the federal immigration court in New York City where I started working as a volunteer interpreter in 2015” (7). The plot then moves backwards to the summer of 2014, when the narrator “decide[s] to go on a family trip from Harlem, New York, to a town in Cochise, Arizona” (8). After crossing the “George Washington Bridge into New Jersey” (8), the plot follows a sequential ordering of events which can be summarized as follows: in the car, the family first hears about the “biblical plague” *en route* towards the US border; the unaccompanied children become trending news as “they drive deeper into the country”(13); back in New York, the narrator finds out that her Green Card is pending; she makes contact with an immigration lawyer who proposes that she volunteer in the federal immigration court; on her first “screening”, she meets Manu, the young boy who fled Tegucigalpa after his best friend was murdered by a local gang; dozens of screenings later follow; the narrator makes stories out of the screenings and tells the stories to her daughter; some of the stories are featured in the plot, even though, interestingly, the narrator only tells of their beginnings; lastly, in ‘IV. Community’, the narrator relates the encounters with her students of ‘Advanced Conversation’ at Hofstra University; the students found the organization ‘TIIA’ (‘Teenage Immigration Integration Association’).

The events from ‘I. Border’ to ‘III. Home’ are framed by the intake questionnaire which is quoted from the first to last question spanning the first three sections. Significantly, the intake questionnaire portrays a narrative line from the past tense of the first question, “[w]hy did you come to the United States?” (7), to future events that have not yet occurred in the last question, “[w]ho would take care of you if you were to return to your home country?” (89), going through all the stages in the middle – intermediary questions such as “[w]hen did you enter the United States?” (13) in the past tense, or “[h]ow do you like where you’re living now?”, and “Are you happy here?” (44) in the present, which evidence the passing of time from one stage to another. The questionnaire moves forward from the events in the children’s past outside of the US to their uncertain future, resembling the structure of the narrator’s story which begins on a family trip in the summer of 2014, and ends at a lecture at university some months later. In the meantime, the narrator has gone through a series of events, carrying on her story, more or less chronologically, through to the end. In this sense, the questionnaire and the narrator’s story reproduce, somehow, the idea of a journey. But very interestingly, the children’s journey does not resemble this structure, neither in the children’s account of their journeys – if they ever share them– nor in the way the narrator tries to relate them. As the narrator points out at the outset of the story, the children’s stories “are always shuffled, stuttered, always shattered beyond the repair of a narrative order” (7), unable to follow a beginning-middle-end order.

All in all, it is worth considering the purpose and scope of the intake questionnaire's last question, "[w]ho would take care of you if you were to return to your home country?" (89). To begin with, the question leads to the departing point in the children's journey, their "home country". Rather than putting an end to the line of events which have brought the children to the US, the final question outlines a circular shape in the narrative form in which the children *would* return to their home countries, instead of staying in the US. However, the story of the narrator does not reflect the narrative impasse of the last question, nor its sense of ending, as it still extends to one more section, 'IV. Community'. As a matter of fact, the closing section of Luiselli's essay can be read either as an epilogue to the narrator's story – a section added before the end of the story which is framed by the intake questionnaire – or as an emancipatory act from the questionnaire's command of the narrative. The story of the narrator can follow its course regardless of the questionnaire, even though it does order and guide the narration in the first three sections, showing that political debates and arguments might stem from somewhere other than bureaucracy and law; for example, and this is a great point, from the student's questions at university.

The last section of the essay inaugurates a new spatial and political setting. The course of 'Advanced Conversation' in Spanish, which the narrator teaches at Hofstra University, is later renamed 'migration think tank' by the students themselves. "The big, ominous building at 26 Federal Plaza", the "labyrinthine architecture" which is, in the narrator's terms, "a replica of the U.S. immigration system" (35) is replaced by a class of 10 students who "look at [the narrator] silently and with a sort of congealed bewilderment" (91). The setting has radically been modified as the coldness of the immigration court is exchanged for the liveliness of a classroom; as a result, the plot narrative changes its course once and for all. The essay is no longer about the children's migratory and bureaucratic nightmare, but about filling the country's "holes in one by one" – the narrator underlines that "[t]he United States is a country full of holes (…) But it's also a place full of individuals who, out of a sense of duty toward other people, perhaps, are willing to fill those holes in one by one" (96). These "individuals" are, for example, the group of 10 students who founded the organization called "TIIA" to teach "intensive English classes, college prep sessions, team sports, a radio program, and a civil rights and duties discussion group" in Long Island and Nassau County[58].

'IV. Community' does not conclude the narrator's story. Far from it: it opens the door to new spaces and political actions. The narrator's story gets suspended, unfinished, as *Tell Me How It Ends* is not the portrait of a Mexican woman living in the US but a work in progress, the absorbing record of an ongoing research into the depths of the US immigration labyrinth – and "while the story continues, the only thing to do is to tell it over and over again as it develops, bifurcates, knots around itself" (96, 97), as the narrator remarks near the end. Her commitment to telling and retelling the children's story, but also her own, "over and over again" leads us to the second reading of the plot, which I examine question by question, or, in other words, beginning by beginning. Does this mean the questionnaire, and therefore the essay, do not possess an overall unity?

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[58] Some of the 'TIIA' meetings and activities were photographed and uploaded on their Facebook page, 'Teenage Immigrant Integration Association – TIIA', *Facebook*, https://www.facebook.com/TIIAHofstra [accessed on 14/07/2021].

Let us begin at the beginning. In section 'What?' of 'Part One' of this *mémoire*, I wrote that "the children's stories pose the issue of narrative beginnings"[59], and, as I stated in 'Mapping Voices', it is not coincidental that the narrator only tells the beginning of the children's stories. Let us examine this idea in depth. Consider, for example, the story that obsesses the narrator's daughter: "It begins with two girls in the courtroom. They're five and seven years old, and they're from a small village in Guatemala…" (55). The narrator outlines the beginning of the story, defines the setting – "the room where interviews take place" – and briefly introduces the "two little girls", "toothless here and there" (55). But the questions posed to the little girls are meaningless for them – what five-year-old can answer the question "Why did you come to the United States?" The mother of the little girls intervenes "filling holes, explaining things", although, as the narrator notes, "also telling her own version of the story" (56), which is obviously not the same as her daughters', but rather the story of her migration and her efforts to bring the children over. As she told the narrator, "[w]hen the younger of the two girls turned two, she decided to migrate north and left the children with their grandmother" (56). The narrator relates the story of the mother to her own daughter who, at some point, asks her "[t]hat's it?", to which the narrator answers, "[t]hat's it" (58). But, as the narrator then observes, "of course it doesn't end there. That's just where it begins, with a court summons: a Notice to Appear" (58), setting the beginning of a different story.

Within the space of a mere fragment, the narrator has established the beginning of three stories: the story of the girls with the dresses, the story of the girls' mother, and the story of the little girls' 'Notice to Appear'. Yet very interestingly, none of the stories are continued– even though the narrator's daughter "often follows up on the stories she half hears" (55), these are not featured in the essay. The only time one of them returns to the narrative is when the narrator describes her role as a translator. "The interpreters", she observes, "have to reconfigure the questions, shift them from the language of adults, to the language of children. When I interviewed the girls with the dresses, for example, I had to break many of the intake questions up into simpler, shorter phrasings" (63). Here, the story of "the girls with the dresses" is not revisited to be continued, but to pose the issue of translation in relation to "the language of the children". A similar situation can be seen with the story of Manu from Tegucigalpa, "the first story [the narrator] heard and translated in court" (42), haunting her ever since. Although Manu's story and, in particular, that first encounter, is revisited on different occasions, it always begins and is approached differently, shedding light on new aspects – which are also new stories. For example, in 'II. Court', the narrator focuses on the "very specific, material detail", of "a piece of paper the boy pulled from his pocket" (42), and its multiple meanings, while the conversation with the lawyers from The Door raises the issue of the transnational tentacles of "MS-13 and Barrio 18 gangs" – "Hempstead High School, Manu tells us, is a hub for MS-13 and Barrio 18" (82). Again, as was the case with the three stories outlined in the fragment on the little girls, these points are not continued or developed further, the narrator only outlining 'thesis statements', but missing the arguments and the conclusion. Now the question to pose is: if there is neither a middle nor an end, is there a (narrative) journey? In summary, does the essay go somewhere?

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[59] See page 10.

The children's stories pose, plainly, the issue of narrative beginnings and the lack of a clear narrative order – perhaps a deliberate lack, as I argued in section '(What?) Mapping Voices', but a lack regardless. That said, not only do the children's stories challenge "the repair of a narrative order" (7) as the essay can also be read in terms of fragmentation, implying the disruption of linearity, both in the discourse and the story – fragmentation branches the story out in multiple directions. Here, the narrator's closing statement, "while the story continues, the only thing to do is to tell it over and over again as it develops, bifurcates, knots around itself" (96, 97) gains meaning. This point begs thorough consideration.

To begin with, the intake questionnaire is not presented in unity, but in pieces, fragmented. Just like the children's stories, the questionnaire is cut into pieces, "shuffled, shattered beyond the repair of a narrative order". The first question is quoted in the first paragraph, but to find question number two we have to skip the following four fragments, covering points from the green card application to the screening, to find: "*[t]hen* comes question number two in the intake questionnaire: "When did you enter the United States?" (13, italics are mine). The function of the linking adverb "then" is ambiguous, as in the previous fragment the narrator is "driving across Oklahoma in early July when [she] first hears about the wave of children arriving, alone and undocumented, at the border" (12), referring to an unrelated event in the narrator's past.

The more the essay moves forwards, the more jumbled the sequencing of the story becomes. "In our long daily drives," the narrator relates in one of the first fragments, "to fill in the empty hours, we sometimes tell our children stories about the old American Southwest" (17). The "stories" are about "Saint Patrick's Battalion", the "Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo" or "President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act", and they are made out of many pieces the narrator tries "to put together", as "all of it resists a rational explanation" (17, 18). The third and fourth questions are then posed: "'With whom did you travel to this country?' and 'Did you travel with anyone you knew?'" (18), adding another thread to the complex weaving of the story. Significantly, the story is not only written horizontally – as a line marching towards the future – but also vertically, the excerpts from the past interwoven with the stories of the present and of the future, all in the same fragment.

The next two fragments describe the routes of "La Bestia", "which literally means 'the beast', and refers to the freight trains that cross Mexico, on top of which as many as half a million Central Americans ride annually" (19), as the narrator posits, and "[t]hey slowly make their way up to the U.S.-Mexico border, following either the eastern Gulf route to Reynosa … or the western routes that lead either to Ciudad Juárez, in Chihuahua, or to Nogales, in Sonora" (20). Sequentially, these two fragments have little to do with the fragment on the stories the narrator relates to her children in the car; the same can be argued about the next fragment on the terrifying numbers of rapes and deaths in the desert (pages 23 to 28), and so on. Like in Cortázar's *Hopscotch*, the narrative functions like a montage, in which not even the sections, 'I. Border', 'II. Court' … demarcate the times and spaces of the story, and fragments can be read independently from one another[60]. Luiselli gives autonomy to the reader, who can, and should, re-order the fragments by her/himself. And that is where the difficulty of the essay really lies: the *how* as opposed to the *what*. The text is unfinished: it demands imaginative and active participation. The journey is not the text; the journey is the reading.

(Where?) "This place is Australia itself": Poetics of Counter-Surveillance

During his temporary detention on Christmas Island, the narrator of *No Friend but the Mountains* hears many commentaries of Australian officials about Manus Island. They threateningly paint the place as a lawless territory inhabited by cannibals and malaria-mosquitoes. "My mind", the narrator recounts, "has been moulded by the commentary of the Australian officials … I think that Manus must be an island with a warm climate and full of insidious, strange insects" (83). Once on the island, however, the narrator finds out that Manus Prison has little to do with that image: the space is fenced in; the law is ubiquitous and absorbing; and the most enthusiastic cannibal would be friendlier than any of the G4S guards. The narrative of the prison, just like any narrative, is all a matter of point of view.

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[60] Note the strong similarity with the structure of the chapters about the detention center in *No Friend but the Mountains*.

"The minibus", the narrator relates shortly after landing, "has arrived somewhere that seems to be Manus Prison" (104). The early thoughts of the narrator about the prison are expressions of bewilderment and grief: "I am exhausted. I am frustrated. Sweat spouts from every pore … Can it be that I sought asylum in Australia only to be exiled to a place I know nothing about?" (105, 107). The narrator's complete ignorance about the place he has been exiled to by the Australian authorities is, however, only momentary. After "wander[ing] around the strange prison" for the first time (110), the narrator wonders: "[w]here the hell is this place? / What kind of prison is this?" (111, / stands for full stop in the original). The questions mark the beginning of an in-depth research about the place he is now confined in. From then on, space is not a trivial and meaningless issue, but a code to decipher, which conveys and carries over meanings for those who circulate inside it. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre posited that "[s]emiology is the source of the claim that space is susceptible to a 'reading', and hence the legitimate object of a practice (reading/writing)" (Lefebvre, 142). As the narrator shows in the book's central chapters, space can be treated as an "object" for reading and theoretical exploration. This section seeks to address the 'readability' of the prison's space and its possible meanings. The practice, I argue, unveils the prison's architecture, both literally and figuratively, revealing itself to be the 'poetics of counter-surveillance'. Through the narrator's lens, the configuration and order of the prison's space is not something given and imposed by the logic of the prison, but an empowering opportunity to redefine and reconsider the prisoners' place within the system, as well as the system itself.

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While in the detention centre on Christmas Island, Australians officials train the prisoners in "the culture, the history, the landscape" of their place of exile, focusing on three main aspects: one, the place is an island; two, "Manusians", the local people, are cannibals and only wear "broad banana leaves" covering their sexual organs and waists (83); three, the place is full of malaria-mosquitoes, and other unspecified insects, which are "potential dangers" and "may threaten [the detainees'] health" (86). The information strikes fear in the detainees, bringing the narrator to wonder, "what is the big deal about Manus? What kind of land can it possibly be?" (86). When the detainees land in Manus, the place has little to do with the terrifying picture described by the Australians, and their training is inadequate and incoherent. To begin with, they were told that Manus was an island – on Christmas Island the narrator had noted, "Manus must be an island with a warm climate and full of insidious, strange mosquitoes" (83). However, the place to which they are being exiled is more reminiscent of a prison – the narrator defines it as “an open-air fenced-off enclosure” (105). The “enclosure” is close to the ocean and the jungle, as the narrator remarks, but the prisoners are not allowed to leave the facilities. The detainees have not been exiled to an island, but to a prison – in other words, to an island within an island – “The place is Fox Camp … That’s where we are … The prison looks like it is in ruins” (108, 109). The difference is significant. Being exiled implies being kept away or restricted from coming to a certain country, but it does not mean being held prisoner.

As the place is not an island but a prison, the people who inhabit it are not “Manusians”, as the detainees were told on Christmas Island – there are indeed some ‘local’ people working but they are not called “Manusians”. When the narrator arrives at “Fox Camp”, he “recognize[s] one person who is taller than the rest. Reza Barati[61] is a Kurdish lad who slept on the bottom bunk of [his] bed a few weeks while [they] were on Christmas Island” (108). The place is packed with detainees like the narrator or Reza – the narrator recounts, “[t]here are so many people in the prison that it feels like they are sitting and talking on tree branches and on the roof of the toilets” (123). Much of the first sections relating the breathless daily life in prison are devoted to witnessing and describing the prisoners’ gatherings: the creation of “communities” of boat passengers and ethnic groups (124); the dance performances “at the end of corridor L” (134); or the “night-time shows” of Maysam The Whore (140). The narrator, then, widening the scope, notes, “[i]n addition to prisoners bustling between the fences and the hallways, *others* prowl the prison” (141, italics are mine). These “others” are not the cannibals to whom the narrator wanted, ironically, to offer his “bony arms” (83), nor the dreadfully dangerous malaria-mosquitoes, but a group named “Bastards’ Security Company” (141), also known as the “G4S” prison guards. As the narrator describes, the G4S are “a security company with the responsibility of keeping the prison secure” (141), and who “enforce every prison rule – rules for both micro-control and macro-control, and rules for the most trivial things through to the most pivotal” (144). The narrator divides the G4S into two groups: the Australians, and the “Papus” – the latter refers to the accurate name for locals (see the footnote on page 147). The two groups are carefully monitored by the narrator, who discloses the main features of each. The Australians are automatons – “a killer is a killer”, the narrator states (143) – mechanical and apathetic; the Papus are kind, fond of smoking – it is “their Achilles heel” (217) – and afraid of reprisals by the ‘authority’, the Australians. Of course, the Papus don’t eat humans. The third and last remarkable aspect from Manus Island which, according to Australian officials, are the malaria-mosquitoes, “these murderous creatures” (155), goes without saying. As the narrator remarks in chapter seven, “[w]ith time, with the changes experienced over days and months, the evidence is clear – it has been a lie. Everyone is convinced: there is no basis to the notion that the mosquitoes carry malaria” (157).

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[61] Reza Barati was killed by Australian officials during the riots in 2017. His death gives closure to the book (see the last line on page 356). At the time of editing this *mémoire*, his parents are suing Australia over his son’s murder. See Ben Doherty, “Reza Barati’s parents sue Australia over son’s murder on Manus”, *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jul/26/reza-baratis-parents-sue-australia-over-sons-on-manus, 26 July 2021.

With the three initial main features of the place then proven to be either wrong or fake, what really is the place where the narrator is exiled to? As he wonders shortly after arriving, “what kind of place is this?”. The answer lies on the walls of his room. The narrator begins the reading of the prison’s space in bed: “It is so tiny”, he remarks, “I feel as if I am suffocating inside it. The thin wooden walls are full of little memories, full of monumental memories, full of memories written here by families” (112). The names of four anonymous people, presumably an Iranian family who were previously detained and lived in the same room, are written on the walls alongside some Persian poetry, and childish drawings of “a small house that looked like a cottage” and “beautiful trees surrounding the cottage” (114). “None of the trees”, the narrator notes, “look like the trees in Manus” (114). The drawings and the Persian lines trigger the narrator’s imagination: “I imagine that Nilou [one of the kids] would play every day in the dirt among the multicoloured flowers…” (114), the same flowers that give strength to the narrator during his worst times in prison. The narrator’s wooden walls encapsulate the prison’s history, the detention and oppression of hundreds of asylum seekers by the Australian authorities. That said, as Lefebvre posited in *The Production of Space*, “space is susceptible of a ‘reading’, and hence the legitimate object to a practice (reading/writing)”. In Manus Prison, space might be suffocatingly fenced in, but this does not prevent the narrator from reading it, and, most importantly, from writing about it.

The practice of reading and writing space begins with the layout of the buildings in prison. Here, it is worth recalling the narrator’s wide-open eyes, a feature largely discussed in previous sections of this *mémoire*. The narrator’s eye for architectural design is apparent in many descriptions, for example, when the narrator notices that “[newcomers] are mainly taken to Fox Prison because it is large and tents can be assembled in that isolated corner. On the western side, two prisons stand opposite each other: Delta and Oscar. But from Fox Prison only Delta Prison is visible. It looks like a cage, like a hive full of bees” (122); or “[b]etween the main corridors and the large tent erected near the main gate and used as a dining area, construction seems to have been going on – a metal structure is covered in rust”, the narrator maps out, “[t]his strange building is called ‘P’ … It is hard to believe anyone could live there, let alone the one-hundred-and-thirty individuals packed into the place by force” (150). Through the narrator’s lens, the prison’s spatial design, although decaying and precarious, seems to follow a certain rational, perceptible order – an order which is, of course, questioned. In “the strange building called ‘P’”, the narrator notes with a touch of irony, “[i]t isn’t clear why the architect designed this disproportionate and strange building. According to what line of thinking was this ugly masterpiece created?" (151).

That said, the experience of space is multisensory and not just visual. As the prisoners' bodies move, smell, eat, touch, or hear within space, they cause the architecture to come to life. Interestingly, the first, and probably most important point, to reflect on is precisely the lack of space. As the narrator overly repeats, in Manus Prison, men are all over the place, and not even in the toilets does he find the solitude he longs for – as he relates, every time he visits the toilet "someone bashes the toilet door with punches and kicks, holding on to his penis: 'Hey man, get out, my guts are exploding! There is no escape" (129). In Manus Prison, prisoners are everywhere, their bodies touching each other constantly, irretrievably, feverishly. For example, following the aforementioned description of "the strange building called 'P'", the narrator remarks that "the space is so small and always filled with people coming and going, one can anticipate rubbing shoulders, and this shoulder-bumping and the interaction of your body with the sweaty, near-naked body of another is disgusting" (151). Bodies are so close that the unpleasant smell of others becomes a torture: the smell of sweat; the smell of bad breath; the smell of the toilets. "What's important", he notes, "is the affliction of the awful smell of bad breath, circulating the room … the unrelenting smell" (151). As the toilets are located next to the buildings where the prisoners live, a stifling smell imbues their sleep – "the atmosphere is suffocating. It's better for one to live among the rubbish than to live in a place that smells like this", the narrator observes (160) as people "piss" "wherever they want" (166). Added to all this is the unbearable heat; despite the buildings and fans, prisoners have no place to hide themselves from the ubiquitous sun: "the sun", the narrator remarks, "seems to be in cahoots with the prison to intensify the misery of the prisoners … it uses its rays like shafts to violate us" (127). Lastly, in Manus Prison the mere idea of silence is unconceivable – "[f]or me, isolation and silence are the greatest gifts I could ask for" (127). The experience of space provides a deep knowledge about the prison's architecture which now stands bare before the narrator's eyes.

Let us now return for a moment to the wooden walls decorated with childish drawings presumably made by the children of an Iranian family. In that subsection the speaker wonders, "*Why does the Australian government have to exile little girls of six or seven years old? / Where in the world do they take children captive and throw them inside a cage? / What crime are those children guilty of? /*" (117). These first insights about the history of the place are revisited again several subsections later: the narrator is walking "away from tunnel P", and enters a "decaying construction, with walls full of holes and cracks" (157). "Inside the rooms", the narrator observes, "and all over the outside walls, cartoons are painted … it seems that it was a place for teaching classes … but now a new group of Sri Lankans live there" (157, 158). The liveliness and naivety of the drawings contrasts with the bleak and sombre situation of the Sri

Lankans and the narrator claims: [t]his space is part of Australia's legacy and a central feature of its history – this place is Australia itself – this right here is Australia" (159). Although the "decaying construction" (158) is in Manus Prison, which is located on Manus Island, a territory of Papua New Guinea approximately 2,885 km from Brisbane, "this right here is Australia". This comment should be read as a statement of intent: Manus Prison is not on Manus Island but in Australia– undeniably, one of the most compelling and daring excerpts in the book. "Just look around", the narrator suggests, "until you accurately understand its architecture" (157).

The understanding of the prison's architecture is indeed a form of counter-surveillance since it is the detainee – the narrator – who is monitoring the prison. At this point in my analysis, it is worth reminding the reader that the Australian government prohibited any staff member working in Manus Island Regional Processing Centre from reporting anything related to the detainees' living conditions. In the central chapters, the narrator steadily observes the prison at times as if it were a foreign and exotic place, and he, a curious traveller in an unknown land. From his portrait, a series of elements regarding the prison's system should be considered since the narrator records specific forms of torture and control within the prison's fences, bearing witness by writing, and writing to never forget.

The prison is leaderless and self-governed. As the narrator describes, this implies that no one is responsible for the fate and dreadful situation of the prisoners: "[w]ho is driving things?" the narrator wonders, "The Kyriarchal System of the prison?" (175). The narrator's research posits that neither the "brainless" G4S guards nor the Papus have agency – like the prisoners, they are unable to act independently and to make their own free choices. Whenever the narrator poses a question to them, "*It leads nowhere /*", the speaker remarks", "*Nothing /No answers to his futile questions/ Nowhere/ Nowhere except the threshold of insanity*" (209, 210). The adverbs "nothing" and "nowhere" stress a double absence: the absence of an answer, and the absence of leadership. The architectural design of the system is imbued with an extreme clarity and structural rationality. Rules and regulations inform every aspect of the prisoners' existence – for instance, the oppressive rule of only allowing five people at a time inside the dining tent. "*The logic of five /Five people follow on from five people / Then the officer turns to five people on their wait out*"; the speaker describes the food queue, and continues "*Human agency is subdued by the number five / (…) Five individuals with full stomachs*" (191). "All the rules, all the regulations", the narrator notes, "are all referred back to one person: The Boss. It is astonishing how the Boss also responds with 'The Boss has given orders'. A long chain ascending through the hierarchy" (212). The uses and abuses of the exaggerated bureaucratic apparatus are thoroughly described as, for example, when the person named 'The Prophet' needs to be medically assisted: "[p]eople wearing white come from the direction of the clinic", the narrator recounts with a touch of irony, "a group of individuals. With medical bags. Wearing white apparel. Moving in haste" (280). Here, the "nurses and doctors" are portrayed as a mysterious ‘other’ with peculiar and unusual habits: “[a]t once, the medical team begins conducting the examination. A woman in white garb, under a powerfully bright light, touches the dip in his back…” (281). Or when the narrator himself, suffering from a toothache, “took an IHMS request form and wrote at the top: ‘Hello prison boss, my tooth hurts” (310), and then gets lost within the labyrinth of the “International Health and Medical Services (IHMS)” (303).

The labyrinthine layout of the “IHMS” reflects the prison’s system in which the detainees are confined, a labyrinth which exceeds the mere physical fences. “The system is designed in such a way that anyone who sets foot in the vicinity of the clinic is forced to return after a few days”, the narrator observes, “[T]his actually means returning a number of times. Ultimately, the patient feels that he will waste away if a day goes by without returning” (304). As the narrator recounts, the prison’s system fosters a climate of extreme dependency of the detainees on the prison. This was probably the worst possible effect of the prison’s system: the detainees’ disrupted lives during the period that they were held captive, spanning the years 2013 to 2017. When in 2017 the PNG Supreme Court of Justice held that the detention of asylum seekers in the Manus Island Regional Offshore Processing Centre was “unconstitutional” and “ultra vires the powers under the *Migration Act*” (quoted in Giannacopoulos and Loughnan, 1118), the detainees were left stranded – rightless, homeless, penniless – on Manus Island after having lived under Australian rules and regulations for four years. Following the decision, former Australian Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, stated in 2017 that “[T]he Coalition Government has had a clear and consistent policy since coming to office; no-one who attempts to enter Australia illegally by boat will ever settle here … These people sought to subvert Australia’s laws by paying people smugglers to bring them illegally to Australia by boat – none will ever resettle here” (Dutton). Although the detainees on Manus Island lived under the yoke of a criminal state – remember the narrator’s words, “this right here is Australia” (159) – the Australian government denied, and continues to deny, any responsibility for the fate of detainees. Their word is against *No Friend but the Mountains*.

(When?) New Routes and Roots; A Comparison of Two Streets: Rue Hugo-de-Senger and Calle Don Sancho

I started thinking about this *mémoire* in the midst of a pandemic. On 14 March 2020, Pedro Sánchez, Prime Minister of Spain, declared a 'state of alarm' and imposed a complete lockdown for the following fourteen days, a measure which would be renewed from time to time. At that time, I was getting ready for what I thought was going to be the last semester of my Master in Comparative Literature in Geneva. On 18 March, I rushed with my housemates to the airport and took the only flight to Madrid. I was lucky: airports closed down the next day. My father came to pick me up and we made the drive to Valladolid, 200 kilometers north of the capital. It was probably the most astonishing journey of my life: we were alone on the road; the streets were empty and quiet; the air smelled like disinfectant. Everything had changed: we had become our own prisoners.

I spent the next seven weeks at home watching the line for the supermarket across the street; listening to the birds and to my neighbours' conversations; cooking slow food and reading science fiction in newspapers. On 2 May, we were finally allowed to set foot on the street. When I woke up, my family was not there; they had already left to discover the outside world. After weeks of human absence, the grass was taller, the air was fresher, and rabbits ran free and wild. The world had become smaller, but at the same time bigger. For the first time I was looking around me with the eyes of an outsider. How did I not see before the beauty of the Pisuerga river in spring; the charm of 'Campo grande'; or the imposing cathedral which was designed to be the biggest in Europe before the Kingdom of Spain ran out of money? I found the answer, unexpectedly, in the 2017 winter issue of *Granta* magazine, 'Journeys', which I have quoted previously in this *mémoire*. "Instead of finding a Western angle of experience in countries like Vietnam", poet Hoa Nguyen writes for *Granta*, "maybe writers should stick closer to home. What would it look like to travel to a mall, a local wood, a suburban tract – to deeply study and visit one's own locale?" (Nguyen in *Granta*, 178). The suggestion, although written in pre-Covid times, resounded in my ears for months. Nguyen's idea was, and still is, glaringly necessary. Over the last year and a half, we have been confined to our houses, streets, and *barrios*, and, in the meantime, new (b)orders have suddenly emerged which have disrupted and relocated the pace of our lives – who was going to tell us, back in March 2020, that we would never dance again with strangers?

"[P]erhaps", Nguyen observes, "writers [and I would add non-writers, academics, and anyone] should name their own environment. What is the shape of your watershed? How is your electricity produced? Where is your water treated?..." (178, 179); she gives us a non-exhaustive list of aspects which configure, and make possible, the places where we live. The poet beautifully concludes her piece by summarizing: "Travel as one's carbon footprint; travel as a footstep, travel as a naming in a landscape in all its complexity. Homing as a way to place oneself in a constellation of process and being" (179). In light of Nguyen's call for local action, there are two places that I can gratefully call home: the first, my parents' house in Calle Don Sancho, Valladolid, at the heart of the Spanish *meseta* (plateau); the second, my student accommodation in Rue Hugo-de-Senger, located in front of the site of Uni Mail, the University of Geneva's hallmark building, where I had the chance to come back in September 2020 to write this *mémoire*. The two streets are, apparently, polar opposites: while Hugo-de-Senger resembles Babel – in my *colocation* (French word for shared flat) alone there are eight different nationalities, and the majority of my *colocs* are, or have been, refugees or migrants – Don Sancho's population, except for the English monks who never leave the street's Anglican Communion church, is exclusively from Valladolid (non-official data, although I would put my hand in the fire, as we say in Spanish, that it is true); Hugo-de-Senger is a 50-meter side street, one of those places that look like nothing happens, whereas Calle Don Sancho is a busy, vibrant avenue with many shops that open and close following the pace of the country's economic crisis. The differences are obvious, but if you look at them closely you will see that they have some significant points in common.

To begin with, in both streets the hub of activity is a *bar* (Spanish word for 'pub', even though the translation is not exactly accurate). In Hugo-de-Senger, the most loyal clients of the Portuguese-owned 'Val d'Arve' restless wait in the small outdoor terrace before the patient waitress opens the door; the menu is in Portuguese: "*bacalhau*", "*feijoada*", "*carne de porco a alentejana*". In Calle Don Sancho, Bulgarian-owned 'El Capricho' daily serves dozens of delicious breakfasts and mid-day beers in a tiny space equivalent to my parents' living-room. The owners of the two *bars*, migrants who left their places years ago, have redefined and reshaped the public space of the streets with their flavors and scents.

The other critical feature the two streets have in common is that both have witnessed the consequences of border violence and the plight of hundreds of migrants who arrive in Europe seeking a better life. 'Accem', a Spanish non-profit organization that helps asylum seekers relocate and integrate within their new communities, is located across from my house in Calle Don Sancho. Their presence there is obvious: since the venue was established in 2016, the human landscape of the street has become less uniform, more eclectic, and truer to life. When I came back on 18 March 2020, the street was terrifyingly empty, if only for a few young men with their bags who sometimes sat in front of my window waiting for something –

the good news is that not even during the pandemic were they left completely alone. As I witnessed from my window, the journeys of these migrants, and the reasons for undertaking it, are more pressing and compelling than any lockdown.

My other house, 'Résidence Hugo-de-Senger', is located next to the former venue of the 'Club social rive gauche'. When I returned there in September 2020, a peaceful, international crowd queued from early in the morning to receive a hot drink, a sandwich, and a lunch ticket. One Friday morning, in mid-September, I heard cries for help. When I looked through the window, a man was lying, motionless, on the floor. The words of one of the social workers stuck in my mind: "on a besoin de faire quelque chose de toute urgence" ("we need to do something urgently"). As the numbers grew bigger every day, the queue was transferred first to the nearby Théâtre Pitoëff, and then to Rue de la Servette 100, on the other side of the lake. The subsequent changes of location led to confusion, and many people still wandered in search of food in the vicinity of Rue Hugo-de-Senger. I remember in particular a young man I met on a cloudy, gloomy day in March. I was struggling to write a section on Valeria Luiselli's essay, so I went for a walk. The man – he was probably my age – came up to me and asked, very politely, if this was the place to get free sandwiches. I answered "no" and then went with him to the nearby theatre. We talked about the weather.

The undocumented children who travel from Central America to US, or the asylum seekers detained on Manus Island, are thousands of kilometers away from these two streets. But the story is the same. Writing a *mémoire* on border violence without raising awareness of the issues that take place right next to the university seems to me at the very least incoherent, if not wrong. In the meantime, as Luiselli writes, "the only thing to do is to tell the story over and over again as it develops, bifurcates, knots around itself. And it must be told, because before anything can be understood, it has to be narrated many times, in many different words and from many different angles, by many different minds" (96, 97).

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Annex: The Intake Questionnaire

(pages are in brackets)

1 – Why did you come to the United States? (7)

2 – When did you enter the United States? (13)

3 – With whom did you travel to this country? (18)

4 – Did you travel with anyone you knew? (18)

5 – What countries did you pass through? (18)

6 – How did you travel here? (18)

7 – Did anything happen on your trip that scared you or hurt you? (25)

8 – Has anyone hurt, threatened, or frightened you since you came to the U.S.? (28)

9 – How do you like where you're living now? (44)

10 – Are you happy here? (44)

11 – Do you feel safe? (44)

12 – Have your parents or siblings been the victim of a crime since they came to the U.S? (47)

13 – Was it reported to the police? (47)

14 – Do you still have any family members that live in your home country? (48)

15 – Are you in touch with anyone in your home country? (48)

16 – Who / How often? (48)

17 – Do you have any other close family members who live in the U.S? (49)

18 – Immigration status? (49)

19 – Who did you live with in your home country? (50)

20 – Did you ever live with anyone else? (50)

21 – How did you get along with the people with whom you lived? (50)

22 – Did you stay in touch with your parents? (63)

23 – Did you go to school in your country of origin? (64)

24 – How old were you when you started going to school? (64)

25 – When did you stop going to school? (64)

26 – Why not? (64)

27 – Did you work in your home country? (64)

28 – What sort of work did you do? (64)

29 – How many hours did you work each day? (64)

30 – Did you ever get in trouble at home when you lived in your home country? (65)

31 – Were you punished if you did something wrong? (65)

32 – How often were you punished? (65)

33 – Did you or anyone in your family have an illness that require special attention? (65)

34 – Did you ever have trouble with gangs or crime in your home country? (74)

35 – Any problems with your government in your home country? (74)

36 – If so, what happened? (74)

37 – Have you ever been a member of a gang? (82)

38 – What do you think that will happen if you go back home? (88)

39 – Are you scared to return? (89)

40 – Who would take care of you if you were to return to your home country? (89)