Rewriting the Refugee Identity in Alter/Native Spaces:
Behrouz Boochani on Twitter

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Abstract: Over the past two decades, facing the intensification of the migrant crisis, the Australian government has carried out seemingly neo-colonial policies, by arbitrarily confining and detaining asylum seekers on the Pacific Islands of Manus and Nauru. In order to oppose these suppressive and exclusionary practices, subaltern subjects have engaged in virtual spaces to re-appropriate and reconceptualise their identity representation. These digital platforms have hereupon provided empowering epistemic resources, which have been mobilized to decolonise the imaginary that discriminatory discourses have imposed on oppressed individuals. The purpose of this article is to analyse, from a linguistic and semantic perspective, how the asylum seeker identity is discursively constructed within the Twittersphere, particularly by the Iranian-Kurdish journalist and writer Behrouz Boochani. The research draws on an epistemic subaltern perspective and relies on a triangulated methodology that combines: Corpus Linguistics, to elicit and analyse quantitative data from the research opportunistic Twitter Corpus; qualitative approaches of Political Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis, to single out thematic patterns that emerge within the counter narrative formulated by the refugee under analysis. The study has the scope of emancipating an Alter/Native standpoint and offer a different perspective through which approach the Australian refugee crisis.

Keywords: Twitter discourse; digital resistance; identity re-appropriation; political agency; Australian refugee crisis;

> The refugees have been able to refashion
> the image of themselves as the "Other".
> We have reshaped the understanding of us
> as politically inept and have been successful
> in projecting an image of who we are.
> (Boochani 18)

Neo-Colonial Answers to the Refugee Crisis

Despite occupying a peripheral position on the world map with respect to the major current conflict zones, over the past twenty years, Australia has been increasingly challenged by maritime arrivals of asylum seekers escaping war and persecutions. In order to contain the escalation of a refugee crisis, the 2012 (re)implementation of the Pacific Solution established that asylum seekers trying to reach the Australian shores via maritime routes without legal documents would be confined in the offshore detention centres on Nauru and Manus Pacific Islands. Legal acts similar to the Pacific Solution, like the PNG Solution or the Malaysian Solution, were enacted by the Australian government to deter refugees from setting foot on the Australian soil. This notwithstanding the criticisms from the UNHRC and other humanitarian and advocacy groups, who condemned the brutality of the governmental policies at a local and global level. Such political manoeuvres come nonetheless to mean indefinite detention for asylum seekers and refugees, who have been kept hostage of this unjust juridical apparatus for years. In this light, the questionable choices of the Australian government have generated heated debates within the political and the public arena, which have as well transferred onto

social media platforms. On the one hand, political leaders have instrumentalised media contents with the purpose of propagating representations of asylum seekers according to their demagogic goals (Clyne 2005); on the other, subaltern subjects have struggled to withstand these subjugating practices of neo-colonial dominance by engaging in online platforms with compelling forms of digital resistance.

One of the emblematic figures who participated vigorously in practices of self-empowerment is Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish-Iranian journalist and writer, who was detained in Manus Prison in 2013 and released only recently, that is mid-November 2019, after six years of incarceration. In Tehran, he was the editor of *Werya*, a magazine that advocated for Kurdish language and culture, which made him a political dissident in the eyes of the regime. After being repeatedly intimidated by the Iranian authorities, Behrouz Boochani fled Iran to avoid imprisonment and undertook a journey through Southeast Asia with the intention of reaching the Australian land. He remained in Kalibata City (Indonesia) for three months, was rescued from a shipwreck on his way to Australia, and lastly ferried to Christmas Island, just as a new law came into force. The *Australia and PNG Regional Settlement Arrangement* (2013)[1] states that asylum seekers who arrive illegally by sea are subject to mandatory offshore detention, namely deported to a third country for processing and resettlement (Karlsen and Phillips).

Boochani was highly prolific from the prison, producing numerous pieces of journalism, academic articles and a documentary film titled *Chauka, please tell us the time* (2017)*.* He authored the 2019 Victorian Prize for Literature award-winner *No Friends But The Mountains: Writing From Manus Prison* (2019), a memoir in which the writer provides his account of the so-called horrific-surreal journey (Tofighian 532) and permanence in Manus Prison. In conjunction with his literary and artistic production, he was highly active in reporting the brutal reality of the prison via major media outlets, among others *The Guardian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and *The Huffington Post*. In 2017 he also opened a Twitter account and continued his activism on the social network.

Previous research has shown the potentiality of Twitter as a powerful tool for communication within settings of political insurgency and social agitations (Castells 2012). In this regard, however, it can be argued that little attention has been paid to practices of identity rewriting acted out by oppressed individuals or groups within the Twittersphere. As a matter of fact, selfhood on new social media has been investigated mainly in connection with processes of micro-celebrity (Khamis et al.), consumerism and performativity (Hund and McGuigan), and personal branding in the field of journalism (Brems et al.). However, following a "decolonial trajectory" (Tofighian 527), this paper seeks to investigate how Behrouz Boochani discursively rearticulates the identity of refugees on the digital platform of Twitter. In addition, it attempts to explore the usage of Twitter as a multi-genre Alter/Native platform, where practices of resistance are operationalized to denounce and oppose neo-colonial discourses of exclusion and oppression.

Decolonising Australia

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[1] The law to which the author is referring is the *Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea and the Government of Australia, relating to the transfer to, and assessment and settlement in, Papua New Guinea of certain persons, and related issues*, signed on July 19th 2013, retrievable here: https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/papua-new-guinea/Pages/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-government-of-the-independent-state-of-papua-new-guinea-and-the-government-of-austr. Accessed 25 Mar 2020.

Drawing upon the theories of media discourse proposed by Norman Fairclough, this study can be placed within the field of mediatized politics (181). According to Fairclough, when analysing mediatized political discourse, it is essential to single out the repertoire of voices, discourses and genres that comprise the communicative network established among socio-political actors (182). Considering the political calibre of Behrouz Boochani's *tweets*, such theoretical framework seems to be appropriate for the investigation.

As a matter of fact, when tweeting, the subjects claim back their political agency and, in doing so, they endorse the re-articulation of selfhood they have been deprived of. Against the incapacity of the subalterns to speak (Spivak), the refugee undermines the status quo of other dominant political voices, which propagate through mainstream media outlets, and redistributes the "political capital" (Fairclough 182) from within an undemocratic setting, that is a remote prison on a Pacific island run by a supposedly liberal democracy (Hage, "Warring Societies" 5). In the very act of expressing themselves, these subaltern voices generate discourses, or better, counter-discourses that collocate at the intersection of what is individual and what is collective (Fairclough 188). In other words, Behrouz Boochani's voice, speaking in the name of the refugee community he represents, produces discourses of decolonisation, communal resistance and subjectivation, which signify the re-establishment of the refugees' agency.

In terms of genre, it is pivotal to take into account the affordances of Twitter, such as immediacy, interactivity, intertextuality, and capillarity, which unveil an enormous political and ideological potential with regards to processes of self-determination for political subjectivities.[2] What is more, the Kurdish-Iranian journalist turns Twitter into a multi-genre platform, combining the genres of memoir, chronicle, journal and other types of interactive contents, which can be accessed through hyperlinks. Besides the political potentialities of these media platforms, more generally, the ubiquitous presence of digital technologies has brought to the fore new forms of storytelling genres that have increasingly thrived on social media (De Fina and Perrino 2). As a result, it has become urgent to investigate how the virtual environment shapes the *telling*, on the basis of the affordances that the media platform provides. Digital storytelling has offered in this respect a variety of fascinating outcomes, for example in the re-contextualization of offline events into the virtuality (see Perrino), the trans-national co-construction of collective identities through individual practices of storytelling (see Simões Marques and Koven), or the enactment of multifarious participatory practices taking place in diverse digital environments (see De Fina and Toscano Gore; Georgakopoulou). In light of the academically well-recognized role of social networking sites in crafting individual and/or collective identities (Dayter 1), the scope of this research is to understand through what means the refugee identity is re-appropriated and rewritten onto the social media platform of Twitter.

In order to provide answers to the research question, the investigation resorts to the highly-contested notion of 'subalternity,' elaborated firstly by the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*. For some scholars, the term has become synonymous with either peasantry or proletariat, especially within the field of Subaltern Studies, which originally used the notion to interpret the peasant insurgencies that took place in Southeast Asia during the post-imperial period (Green 16). However, Gramsci was certainly aware that subalternity expands to other contexts and can include various categories, as long as there is an understanding of the forces that shape the making of human subjectivity (Smith 44). Within the

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[2] Suffice to mention the fundamental role of social media during the Arab Spring or the Iranian Green Movement for the enhancement of a grassroots political participation, which emerged with the aim of opposing and dismantling long-lasting tyrannical political establishments (see, for example, Stepanova; Nguyen)

scenario of the current migrant crisis, these tensions towards the subject self-determination have to confront, in the midst of a humanitarian emergency, with policies of inclusion and exclusion, put in place by modern states to defend themselves from an envisaged outer threat. The principle of citizenship is at the centre of such discourses, which are nowadays being formulated by national governments worldwide to reaffirm the state sovereignty. More specifically, the current study takes into consideration those theories which conceptualise the subaltern as the paradigmatic subject which is *de facto* excluded but *de iure* included for the definition of citizenship criteria (Mezzadra 51). As Johnson points out:

> [t]he agency of non-citizens, and of irregular migrants and asylum seekers particularly, is shaped profoundly by their position within the power relations of a global society of sovereign nation-states. As non-citizens, they are not a part of the broader social contract that underpins the territorial sovereign power of the nation-state. They are thus outside of the complex of rights and obligations upon which the state is based and so are unable to make "legitimate" claims to either citizenship rights or to political participation. As migrants, their crossing of the border represents a rupture in the capacity of the state to control the border, and thus territorial membership of the citizen community. The consequence of this both marginalizing and potentially threatening position is that non-citizens as migrants are subject to tight control and to increasingly restrictive and exclusionary policies as practices. The extremes of these are those policies of encampment and detention within global border spaces that exert control over non-citizens by making the boundary between citizen and non-citizen not only political but spatial. (Johnson 109)

The problem here is that a society whose citizenship criteria are not based on equal principles inevitably ends up resorting to unequal principles of attribution, which at the same time support and validate discriminatory policies. However, rather than using the terms exclusion or inclusion, one should speak about the "constitution" of subaltern social groups, which is eventually inscribed *within* processes of material construction of the modern state itself (Thomas 1). As a result of this reasoning, the subject constitution is the agential consequence of both a legitimate and subversive act, which happens outside the citizenship parameters. In this sense, the subaltern category offers an interesting framework of understanding which is useful for interrogating current dynamics of domination and resistance and shed light on the legacy of a "colonial-settler mentality" (Hage, "Warring Societies" 2), which is apparently still ingrained into the Australian *modus operandi* of the 21st century. What is paradoxical is that, in order to defend democratic principles, such as citizenship or cultural integrity, societies end up carrying out inhuman practices (Hage, "Warring Societies" 4), as it will be shown in the following paper sections. Nonetheless, this study aims to reveal that, even in suppressive conditions, subaltern individuals are "never completely deprived of expressive or representative capacities" (Thomas 13), through which they manage to rearticulate their identity.

Resisting Digitally

In order to carry out the small-scale research project, an opportunistic Twitter Corpus was purposely created. The Corpus comprises a total of 1,227 *tweets*, which were collected on the 20th of June 2019 directly from @BehrouzBoochani's Twitter account (hereafter *BB Corpus*). The *tweets* were elicited through GIT, which is an open source software used to track changes in sets of files, in combination with the Twitter Search API (Application Programming Interface), which is a free service that allows software to retrieve *tweets* automatically. The time span considered for the collection ranged from January 1st 2017, which is when Behrouz Boochani opened his Twitter account, until May 18th 2019, which is the date on which the 2019

Australian federal election was held. Both dates account for "key discourse moments" (Nguyen and McCallum 165), that is crucial events that have relevant discursive implications: the former, since it marks the beginning of a digital counter-discourse performed on the social network of Twitter by the former detainee Behrouz Boochani, and the latter, since the elections could imply a political shift in the way the refugee issue was being handled.

As a first analytical step, preliminary approaches of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) were employed, with the aim to bring into focus the socio-historical context in which Behrouz Boochani enacts processes of identity rewriting. Van Dijk, in this respect, suggests that "the study of political discourse should not be limited to the structural properties of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures" (15). A practical scheme compiled by Van Dijk (19) was followed in order to point out the circumstances and the modalities in which discourses of digital resistance are articulated by Behrouz Boochani within the Twittersphere. The approach chosen appears to be the most suitable for the current study also given that PDA "deals especially with the reproduction of political power, power abuse or domination through political discourse, including various forms of resistance or counter-power against such forms of discursive dominance" (Van Dijk 12).

Some of the strands of the legal setting concerning the Australian refugee crisis have been already enunciated in the first part of the paper and will be briefly reconsidered in this section. Substantially, Behrouz Boochani's tweeting can be fully understood if contextualized within the domain of political discourse, and more specifically, within the Institution of Manus Prison. The latter has been named by the same author as a form of "Kyriarchy": a term originally introduced by the feminist theologian Elizabeth Schlüssler Fiorenza, which refers to the complex structural systems underlying detention regimes, established on interlocking practices of domination, oppression and submission (215). This article argues that, despite the operations architected to govern the refugees issue, political actors, who are relegated to positions of subordination, should not be considered as hopeless victims, as this is precisely the reason why they have often been depoliticised and denied any chance of self-determination (Mezzadra 10). On the contrary, Behrouz Boochani, *tweeting* in the name of his fellow refugees, carries through political processes of self-empowerment to denounce the policy of confinement and the brutal logics of the prison, claiming back their right of existence as well as other basic and fundamental human rights, which are perpetually violated within the prison environment.

Token	Hits	Rank
Manus	1077	3
refugees	454	13
people	410	16
prison	305	18
Australia	269	23
We	267	24
They	265	25
Australian	210	32
Nauru	196	37
Refugee	175	43
He	172	44
Camp	163	49
Island	161	50

Immigration	147	52
Today	146	53
Now	126	59
Gov	113	62
Police	103	71
Medical	99	75
Png	98	77
Human	80	93
Detention	72	102

Table 1. Word Frequency List of the *BB Corpus*

As a second analytical phase, in order to single out the most frequent words in the *BB Corpus*, a Word Frequency List (hereafter WFL) was elicited and approaches of Corpus Linguistics were applied to the quantitative data retrieved, in order to gain insights into Behrouz Boochani's discourse. The WFL shows that, among the refugee in-group and the out-groups, there is a clear polarization in terms of self-identification and other-oppositions. As a matter of fact, in order to interpret the data, the "friend versus enemy" distinction, formulated originally by Carl Schmitt (2013), can be applied to the interpretative reading of the WFL. According to the latter, the formation of the political identity derives from an inherent antagonism between pluralities and originates from this ontological but antithetical opposition. These theories are supported by the data since, as can be seen from the results (Table 1), the most recurring words express contrast semantically, politically, and even spatially, like a) the toponyms "Manus/Nauru," that is the islands where asylum seekers and refugees are confined and detained according to the previously mentioned law, which stand in contrast with the tokens "Australia/Png" (Papua New Guinea), namely the nations that run the offshore detention centres on the Pacific Islands; b) the political pronouns "We" versus "They," core tenet of the "friend versus enemy" distinction (see above) and the "ideological square" dichotomy, *further elaborated by Van Dijk, which similarly "reflect[s] the partisan strategies of power in the political process" (34); c) the opposition between "Immigration" and "Detention," the latter coming to be the lawful consequence of the former, in light of the segregation policies perpetrated by the Australian government over the past years; d) and, lastly, the tokens "Refugees" versus "Gov" (which stands for "government"), conceptualised as the main political opponents, as emerges from Behrouz Boochani's *tweets*. Knowing the context of the crisis, these tokens hint, in sum, at a clearly distinguishable binary opposition and, especially after a close reading of the *tweets*, reveal a certain degree of rivalry in their content. However, they can also be grouped on the basis of an ontological similarity: e) "Manus," "Island," "Prison" and "Camp," with regards to the geographical and physical space where the confinement of asylum seekers takes place, or else, the spatial manifestations of the Kyriarchal system; f) "Gov" and "Police," which account for the institutional bodies that operate on the other side of the barricade: the former emanating legal acts that result into hatred and segregation, and the latter enforcing physically the law within the detention centres; g) "People," "We," "Refugees" and "Human," which represent the standpoint from which the counter-narratives under analysis are produced. This last group of tokens also allude to solidarity, companionship and in-group cohesion. "Now" and "Today" are also assimilable, both pointing to the urgency of solving the critical situation in which the refugees are placed in.

The third methodological phase comprised approaches of Content Analysis and sought to pinpoint thematic patterns that occur within the counter-narratives produced on Twitter. In other words, this analytical part aimed to identify discursive modalities through which Behrouz Boochani reformulates the refugee's suppressed identity. During this phase, the *BB Corpus* was coded manually. Since it is a data-driven type of research, labels were assigned while reading the *tweets* only after the data collection took place. After several reading phases of the Corpus, it was possible to identify the spheres in which the representation and rewriting of the refugee identity occurs. As emerged from the data, processes of subjectivation manifest within intertwined and manifold domains that constitute the selfhood of an oppressed individual or community. In particular, the *tweets* could be divided into three main macro-categories, which

are 1) the spatial-juridical, 2) the cultural-political, 3) and the aesthetical. What is novel to these historically-known processes is that in nowadays' hyper-technological societies these self-empowering practices come to be performed on Alter/Native virtual platforms, such as Twitter in Behrouz Boochani's case. The above-mentioned macro domains could symbolically account for three precise eschatological moments concerning the excursus of the refugee emancipation: firstly, the refugee identity is destroyed by the adverse spatial and juridical conditions that annihilate it; secondly, the defeated individuality is metaphorically deposed and handed over to the receiving society, posing questions of legitimacy and righteousness with respect to the violence perpetrated on the vulnerable body; thirdly, the inert presence revitalizes through an aesthetical reanimation, which is declined through various artistic expedients. These three pivotal moments will be discursively analysed in the following three sections of the paper, providing an insight into each of the progressive stages of the "refugee self-making" (Perera 64).

Spatial and Juridical Annihilation
According to previous literature and evidence in media coverage (Hightower 335), refugees and asylum seekers are often associated with the notion of 'limbo,' which can acquire a variety of connotations. In this specific case, limbo is a suspended physical space fluctuating above other spaces, that is a) Manus prison, in which the refugees are detained, b) the autochthonous Manusian community, who inhabits the island and spreads in the surroundings of the prison, c) Australia, that is the imagined hosting and at the same time rejecting society, d) and the refugees' place of origin or the place of escape. The result of this physical suspension makes the refugees "humans of the Nowhere Land" (example 2). However, limbo, as example 1 shows, can also be temporal, since Behrouz Boochani and the other refugees have been subject to an indefinite imprisonment on the island. This "barbaric exile policy" (example 1), therefore, relegates refugees in a position of an a-temporal and a-spatial non-belonging, with dramatic consequences.

On the whole, these two dimensions of limbo can be synthesized through the notion of 'stuckedness,' defined by Hage as "the sentiment and the state of being … existentially 'stuck,'" which constitutes an obstacle to the "existential mobility," crucial for the realization of the self (*Alter-Politics* 2). Being stuck in limbos, refugees feel paralyzed and unable to proceed with their lives, as individuals usually do in a free society.

(1) We've been living in a limbo for more than five years now. This barbaric exile policy has already killed 12 innocent people, destroyed so many lives and families. Shame on the Australian politicians and their media for ignoring what is happening here. It's nothing but sadism. (@BehrouzBoochani Aug 13, 2013)
(2) The historical resistance of refugees can be read as a manifesto from all the stateless and marginalized people around the world. We humans of the Nowhere land will make the sovereign powers of the world explain this global barbaric oppression of innocent asylum seekers. #auspol. (@BehrouzBoochani Feb 4, 2019)

From a juridical perspective, the notion of limbo represents a "legal irreconcilability" (Hightower 335), as it is nothing but the result of restrictive laws and policies implemented by the Australian government to spatially and legally confine refugees. This resonates with another concept, developed by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, the notion of "Camp as the Nomos of the Modern." According to Agamben, "[t]he camp is the space that is opened when the state of exception begins to become the rule. In the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is

now given a permanent spatial arrangement" (168-170). In this vein, Achille Mbembe, recalling the definition of 'biopower' proposed by Michel Foucault, argues that the camp represents the perfect metaphor through which the sovereign power of modern states expresses itself, which results in the ruthless administration of life and death (Mbembe 12). However, Mbembe argues that it is not sufficient to problematize the refugee issue through the analytical lens of 'biopolitics'; rather, he proposes the conceptual framework of 'necropolitics,'

> to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead. (Mbembe 40)

The capacity of a national power to govern over the domain of life and death of individuals is often justified and driven forward in the name of a national integrity to defend from an unescapable moral and cultural societal collapse. However, the main concern is that "*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and population*" is carried out not by "piece[s] of prodigious insanity" but by a legitimated ruling body within a political democratic setting (Mbembe 14, original emphasis). For how oxymoronic this may sound, death came to be democratized and even industrialized (Mbembe 18). In this light, Manus Prison is undeniably a prototypical example of a modern camp, as it is strikingly evident in example 3, a place where the concentration imaginary materializes, where "its inhabitants are divested of political status and reduced to bare life" (Mbembe 12). This is evoked in Boochani's words in the following two examples where he criticizes the "police and juridical system" (example 3) for their connivance with respect to the normalizing of torture and the consequent censorship (example 4).

> (3) One of the major problems we have on Manus & Nauru is that there's nowhere for us to go to and complain when we are mistreated. The police and juridical system have been at the service of those who exiled and tortured us. We are standing outside the law but still subject to it. (@BehrouzBoochani Jan 6, 2019)
>
> (4) The situation on Manus is getting worse by the minute. keeping innocent people in this island for more than five years is perishing people's soul and body. We don't know how to deal with your complex systems of normalizing torture and censorship anymore. Close your bloody camps. (@BehrouzBoochani Aug 13, 2018)

Nonetheless, this limbo may account for an "interstitial liminal space," as Bhabha claims, a marginal opening that "provide[s] the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" (Bhabha 2). Boochani is indeed able to overthrown his subaltern position, by interpreting refugees' bare life as a "political and philosophical manifesto" (example 5).

> (5) We are not embarrassed of our bare bodies. Our flesh and bones are our political and philosophical manifesto. Our bare bodies have been the subject of your political games for years. Soon these bare lives will shatter your power structures by exposing your violence. (@BehrouzBoochani Feb 4, 2019)

As the *tweets* above highlight, this first analytical section of this article has clearly shown how the Australian government has strategically dispossessed asylum seekers of anything that comprises their sense of identity, thus reducing them to just "flesh and bones." However,

despite this seemingly perpetual spiral of violence, there is still a possibility of survival within the spatio-temporal suspended locus inhabited by refugees. Before this existential, political and legal immobility, Boochani reacts by appropriating the digital medium as an Alter/Native space in order to challenge and finally reverse the dominant discourse. In this sense, the platform of Twitter can be conceptualized as a digital limbo, wherein oppositional counter-narratives are formulated and wherefrom they reach international audiences. In other words, Twitter accounts for a virtual non-place, accommodating attempts of identity rewriting and offering a space of virtual belonging. In the next section, the selected *tweets* reveal how the refugee's spectral presence inevitably comes to haunt the Australian society. Finally, in the last example, a chance of revivification is proposed.

Cultural and Political Deposition

Another concept that should be included within the framework of analysis, related to the cultural and political aspect of the issue under investigation, is the concept of "cultural hegemony," which was defined by Gramsci as the ensemble of modalities through which a dominating group obtains consent from a subjugated one, which allows the former to superimpose its power over the latter (Gramsci 145). More specifically, Gramsci formulated that it is by the reproduction of certain ideologies and beliefs through societal institutions that the cultural hegemony is validated and sustained (Gramsci 145). Following the Gramscian line of thought, scholars have argued that there has always been a tension between the structured social body and human agency (Mezzadra 219). For instance, Raymond Williams, affirms that hegemony is not a system nor a structure but a dynamic process, in that "it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not all its own" (Williams 113). While manufacturing consent (Gramsci 145), the cultural-political framework provides epistemological margins for it to be contested and resisted, thus allowing the subaltern to dismantle the dominant/dominated pattern through self-representative strategies. In this respect, it has often been argued that hegemony is a historical process of conflict and struggle and that resistance to hegemony starts to develop at the level of the personal or the subjective (Smith 43). At the same time, what should not be overlooked are the implications that hegemony has on civil society, particularly in the replication of discourses of violence and segregation within political and cultural structures, compared to "a cancer expanding its roots" (example 7). Boochani tries to sensitize Australians with regards to these controversial dynamics, as shown in example 6 and 7:

(6) The resistance of refugees on Manus & Nauru has brought a new and complex life and thought into this political and cultural structure. This without doubt is a historical evolution. The resistance of refugees is a revolution against neo-fascism. (@BehrouzBoochani Feb 4, 2019)

(7) Manus and Nauru prisons are a part of the Australian political culture and system, and continue to impact them on everyday. P. Dutton will soon be applying the dictatorship that he has practiced on refugees to the entire Australian society. Just like a cancer expanding its roots. (@BehrouzBoochani Apr 10, 2018)

What Boochani also denounces is the demagogic rhetoric used by political leaders who, through speculations about the matter of asylum seekers, manipulate voters to obtain electoral consensus. As a matter of fact, refugees have been instrumentalised by a bipartisan political propaganda and used as media fodder to fuel nationalistic and sovereign sentiments among the audience (example 8 and 9).

(8) The life of innocent asylum seekers has been a political tool for the left and right parties of the Australian government, dragged from one cage to another, one island to another... enough is enough. Stop this ridiculous game and let us go. #Manus #auspol. (@BehrouzBoochani Feb 17, 2019)

(9) Australian government has abused us as a political tool for over five years. Now it seems like caging innocent people does gain them political benefits any more. Time to stop using refugees as pawns. Close your bloody prison camps. #KidsOffNauru #Manus. (@BehrouzBoochani Oct 16, 2018)

Another salient counter-narrative traceable throughout the BB Twitter Corpus is how the handling of the refugee crisis, that is "the story of Australia today" (example 12) resembles certain annihilating policies perpetrated during the colonial times as well as during the Fascist era. In examples 10 and 12, Boochani overtly warns that history is repeating again, that superpowers, now in the guise of liberal democracies, are dusting off pages of their truculent past, and re-awakening the buried "horrifying monsters" (example 11) in their "modern version[s]" (example 10). This claim is corroborated by the theories of Achille Mbembe, who argues that the colonial world was actually the experimental laboratory for the operationalization of the Western rationality, incarnating the perfect synthesis between "massacre and bureaucracy" (Mbembe 23). In other words, the colony as well as the camp represent "the site where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law (*ab legibus solutus*) and where 'peace' is more likely to take on the face of a 'war without end'" (Mbembe 23).

(10) What's happening on Manus & Nauru is a modern version of slavery. In the past it was human labor exploited for their economical gain, but today it's our very lives sold for their political gain. What else can justify taking two thousand lives hostage then? #Manus #Nauru. (@BehrouzBoochani Oct 10, 2018)

(11) Why is Manus Prison Theory important? And why is in-depth historical research necessary? Manus & Nauru are vivid mirror-images of neocolonialism; a horrifying monster with a face that even frightens itself. #Manus. (@BehrouzBoochani Jan 10, 2019)

(12) This story is a portrait of Australia today, like a mirror that reflects its image. The growing fascism of the 21st century, the ultimate display of power of a system over the bodies of the most vulnerable people. This is the violence of the law. (@BehrouzBoochani Jun 14, 2018)

In this perspective, Hage has defined these moves as strategies enacted by the so-called "warring society," that is a society which is "permanently *geared* towards war" (Hage, *Alter-Politics* 3) in the face of potential dangerous enemies. The consequence of the constant reiteration of such discourses and the abiding perpetuation of such practices, as they come to be mainstreamed into the society and the culture of reference, is the normalization of their brutality, although all this once "used to be totally, unbelievably unacceptable" (Hage, "Warring Societies" 6). According to Hage, this has subsequently generated a "culture of impunity" ("Warring Societies" 10), which has entitled the Australian government to silence or ignore any opposition (example 13). Another repercussion occurs through the legitimation of violence, or ultimately through the arrogation of "a license to kill" (Hage, "Warring Societies" 10), in spite of contextual petitions signed by international organizations and authoritative professionals (example 13), or protests organized by the civil society in Australia (example 14).

(13) Almost 6000 doctors signed a petition, calling for immediate evacuation of children in detention on Nauru. UNHCR and other respectful organisations called to close the prison camps on Manus and Nauru but as always the government ignores them all. This is fascism. #Manus #Nauru. (@BehrouzBoochani Oct 15, 2018)

(14) Thousands of people are protesting today across Australia against its barbaric policy of exiling asylum seekers. It's a strong message to the politicians to close these bloody camps after almost six years now. Thank you all for your support and standing up for humanity. #Manus. (@BehrouzBoochani Oct 27, 2018)

Overall, it can be argued that, on the one hand, the deposition of the emaciated body of the refugee is received with indifference by certain political and governmental bodies. On the other, it still provokes indignation and ignite reactions of opposition within the civil society. On the whole, such evidence corroborates Gramsci's intuition regarding the possibility of hegemony to be contrasted by subjugated groups, who conversely struggle to manufacture dissent. As can be seen in the following subsection, dissent materializes or sublimates through aesthetic recourses, which allow refugees to reformulate their expressive capacities against the silencing perpetrated by the government. Boochani uses Twitter as a platform to free his eclectic talents and publicize his artistic creations, this being, perhaps, the only way to resurrect from a scenario of violence and death.

Aesthetical Resurrection
In order to detect how the rewriting of the subaltern subjectivity takes place through aesthetics, the paper draws upon the theories of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, who stated that politics is intrinsically aesthetic, "in that it makes visible what had been excluded from a perceptual field, and in that it makes audible what used to be inaudible" (58). He also adds that political struggles occur for the "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière 2), which is determined by bodies of control and surveillance that define the limits of what may be conceived and expressed within a specific society, and, above all, who may have access to the "sensible" and who may not (Rancière 2). Consequently, the aesthetics of politics becomes an issue of entitlement, given that some individuals are allowed and some are excluded from this distribution. Summing up Rancière's thought, Jooste argues that "politics is a redistribution of the sensible and to redistribute the sensible means to bring into question both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done, as well as the distribution of those thought capable of perceiving, thinking and doing" (Jooste 92).

One of the risky repercussions of this manipulation is that what is expressed and thought in a given socio-cultural context structures what may be thought and expressed further. Nonetheless, Tanke claims that the role of politics is to create new contents and meanings to breach and enlarge the already predetermined "perceptual field" (2). Boochani has successfully achieved the enlargement of this perceptual sphere thanks to his literary and cinematographic production from within the prison as well as his collaborative works with artists of different kind within and outside Australia. In the examples below, several of his artistic productions are mentioned: his award-winning book *No Friend but the Mountains. Writing from Manus Prison* (example 15); his video work *Remains*, exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Sydney (example 16); his co-directed documentary *Chauka please tell us the time* (example 17); and the play *Manus*, which was premiered during the Adelaide Festival (example 18).

(15) Artists, writers, academics and musicians engaged with the book 'No Friends but the Mountains' in Melbourne last night. A special thanks to my mountain friends Nikos Papastergiadis, Arnold Zable, Gary Foley, Hoda Afshar, Omid Tofighian & Janet Galbraith who made this possible. (@BehrouzBoochani Nov 1, 2018)

(16) In our video work Remains, Hoda Afshar & I created a new language for speaking about the plight of refugees. The Aus barbaric policy of torturing innocent people is narrated through our bodies, performance, music and nature. Don't miss this unique work at MCA. (@BehrouzBoochani Nov 7, 2018)

(17) You can whatch the movie "Chauka please tell us the time" here. It was shot on mobile phone inside Manus prison in 2016 & gives a picture of what the Manus prison system is. The movie reached festivals around the world. (@BehrouzBoochani Jun 10, 2019)

(18) Manus play has got so much attention in Adelaide Festival over the past few days. Today will be the last performance. Here is another review about the play. (@BehrouzBoochani Mar 10, 2019)

Conclusion

This article has attempted to shed light onto the processes through which the refugee identity is re-appropriated and rewritten on the digital platform of Twitter by the former detainee Behrouz Boochani. It was revealed that already by interrogating the lexical composition of the corpus there is a clear signification in terms of self-identification and other-oppositions. Secondly, the study has showed how the re-articulation of the refugee identity occurs within three main macro-categories, that is the spatial-juridical, the cultural-political and the aesthetical. Metaphorically speaking, it is as though the refugee body went through different morphing phases: death, as a result of a spatial and juridical annihilation; its deposition within a cultural-political milieu that has to deal with the interrogating refugee's spectral presence; and its aesthetic ascension, which comes about by the means of an artistic self-emancipation, through the elaboration and the production of expressive creations.

The article has also revealed that, in the face of neocolonial practices put in place by the Australian government, *tweeting* can be interpreted as a form of resistance, an "epistemology of liberation," as Boochani defines it in one of his *tweets*, which reestablishes the refugee's selfhood against a system of subjugation. This re-appropriative process resonates well with what Ashcroft has defined as the "interpolation" of the subaltern subject, i.e. a capacity to "interpose, to intervene, to interject a wide range of counter-discursive tactics into the dominant discourse" (Ashcroft 47). In sum, the outcomes of the present study aspire to enhance an understanding of how the self-making of the subaltern subject may discursively signify the self-realization of the same (Perera 64).

However, one of the major limitations of this research is that only one Twitter account was taken into consideration for the analysis, namely that of @BehrouzBoochani. Therefore, results may not be generalizable, meaning that other refugees may use the digital platform of Twitter for other purposes. In any case, this article has tried to put in the spotlight the extraordinariness of Boochani's role in establishing a tradition of digital resistance, which may hopefully be passed down to other subaltern individuals or groups who may have the possibility to use technologies to their advantage. Further research in the academic field is invoked in order to provide a deeper insight into how neocolonial practices can be resisted through the tools that the current hyper-technological era has dispensed. Ultimately, this article wishes to contribute to the realization of a much needed ethical turn in a widespread "culture of impunity" (Hage, "Warring Societies" 10) in which we are nowadays numbly living.

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