



★ **No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison**

Behrouz Boochani

Omid Tofighian, Translator

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Behrouz Boochani is a young Kurdish journalist, poet, and refugee imprisoned on Australia's Manus Island, and that his astonishing memoir *No Friend but the Mountains* exists at all is a miracle and a testament to his resilience.

After three months wandering hungry in Indonesia, Boochani and other asylum-seekers were packed into a truck, expected to travel through the jungle to the sea. There, a boat awaited to take them to Australia, but everything depended on silence. All were afraid.

Battling storms in a leaky, rotting boat, Boochani found that “a brush with mortality gives life a marvelous sense of meaning.” Starving, he came to appreciate how a single pistachio could mean the difference between survival and death. But imprisonment in the land they'd seen as a place of freedom proved to be the ultimate cruelty.

Boochani wrote this book in Farsi and smuggled it out of the Manus Island prison on WhatsApp, via tweets, phone calls, videos, and emails, all in defiance of the Australian government. It was dangerous work. On Manus Island, he says, asylum seekers are systematically stripped of their dignity, with everything possible done to break them and destroy their hope for freedom.

Boochani reports horrifying responses: some prisoners resort to self-immolation, and one young girl sews her lips together. Boochani himself took refuge in creativity, hard-to-find moments of silence, and in his belief that words have the power to change hearts and minds.

As war, crime, famine, and civil disruption result in growing numbers of asylum-seekers, Boochani's deeply disturbing memoir introduces readers to hard realities and reveals the wounded hearts of captors and prisoners alike.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July/August 2019)

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