



Stealing Time

Migration, Temporalities and State Violence

Edited by
Monish Bhatia · Victoria Canning

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Stealing Time

“Time is more than the passing of minutes or hours. It is the space for love, arts, politics, passions, safety, connections, humanity. This compelling book illuminates time and its violent theft by state and corporate border bureaucracies. It is an analytical, provocative and necessary read.”

—Prof. Elizabeth Stanley, *Victoria University of Wellington, Australia*

“This outstanding volume takes our understanding of state crime and the undocumented migration process in an important new direction. By employing the concept of temporality, Monish Bhatia and Vicky Canning have brought together an innovative group of scholars who, collectively, weaponise what they call ‘migrant time’. Through this lens of temporality each of the chapters offers powerful new insights into the state’s repertoire of violence against asylum seekers and refugees while simultaneously bringing to the fore the resistance that this ‘hidden’ form of repression engenders in those subject to its harms.”

—Prof. Penny Green, *Queen Mary University, UK*

“In this remarkable volume, we see vividly how time itself is an object and target of power, and rather than a natural fact, is produced through governance. By taking migration as their central framework of analysis, the contributors to this book provide a profound and memorable critical investigation of state power and the subtle violence of bureaucracy. This book is a landmark event in consolidating the incipient field of critical studies of temporality, and in situating human mobility and borders at the heart of understanding the place of time in social domination.”

—Prof. Nicholas De Genova, *University of Houston, USA*

“Time, and the loss of time, is not just incidental in the treatment of migrants who are subject to state power. It is structural and directed as well as emphatic in its effects. This powerful book driven by two renowned scholars, Monish Bhatia and Victoria Canning, delivers this message in a clear and creative manner through chapters from the frontlines of migration scholarship. A must read.”

—Dr. Devyani Prabhat, *University of Bristol, UK*

“Monish Bhatia and Victoria Canning bring together a stellar group of scholars from around the world to discuss how punitive migration laws steal time – which is literally our most valuable resource. This study of temporality is chock full of useful theoretical insights. Migrants are at the mercy of the host state and often have no choice but to wait for decisions, appointments, interviews, and legal and policy changes. Migrants spend countless hours building families, friendship networks, and communities – only to have that stolen away when they are detained and deported. While in immigration detention, detainees count time up – instead of down as they do in prison – as their release dates are nearly always uncertain. These are just some of the ways the authors and editors theorize temporality in the migration context. This beautifully put together collection is a must-read for any student of migration.”

—Professor Tanya Golash Boza, *Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of California, USA*

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Editors

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Violence

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Editors

Monish Bhatia
School of Law
Birkbeck, University of London
London, UK

Victoria Canning
School for Policy Studies
University of Bristol
Bristol, UK

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Dedicated to those whose time is stolen by borders.

Foreword: Adrift in the Global Migration Regime

A dense web of technologies of control exercised by states, supranational institutions and increasingly international corporations shapes and patterns timings, timelines and tempo of migrant lives, from the fragmented, protracted and dangerous journeys to reach safety and hope for a better life, to the choreographed rituals of citizenship ceremonies and the sudden accelerations of forced removals.

Through an examination of everyday ruptures, transits, beginnings and endings in the lives of those increasingly disenfranchised by omnipresent borders, particularly people seeking asylum and 'unwanted' migrants, this edited book offers a captivating conceptual and empirical journey into the unexpected contingencies and detours, the necessarily fluid aspirations and desires, the frustrated hopes and helplessness of lost time, that feature prominently in the lives of migrants and refugees.

In uncovering the everyday impact of migration governance on migrants and the many ways in which human existence is shaped, defined and confined within the narrowing spaces of immigration laws and the violence of borders and immigration enforcement practice, the book invites the readers to see the *stealing* of time not as a side-effects rather

a structural component of migration governance—an active, deliberate and inherently harmful one, the editors explain in the Introduction. The stealing of time, in its many forms, contributes to produce docile and exploitable subjects and, in doing so, it is central to the process of illegalisation of migration, observed by several critical migration scholars. The illegalisation of migration is a global phenomenon, affecting a growing number of migrants and forms of mobility; a process that co-opts into a permanent state of uncertainty and precariousness groups of immigrants who, until not long ago, were granted secure and permanent legal status and rights.

Drawing on contributions from established and up-and-coming scholars, migrant rights activists and border crossers, this collection is an important addition to an emerging body of scholarship in migration studies on temporal dimensions in the analysis of migration governance and migrant experiences. Importantly, it builds on a range of analytical perspectives and positionalities, and from a wide range of case studies, which capture different stages in migration trajectories and a variety of contexts and spaces where the lives of ‘unwanted’ migrants unfold, from camps to detention centres, from asylum reception centres to border crossings. The list of countries covered in the collection is noticeable, from Afghanistan to Manus Island, from Mexico to the USA, from Syria to Jordan, Turkey and the EU, all contributing to shed light on how multiple regimes and logics of time both produce, and are produced by and in migration processes. This brings to the fore questions currently at the margin of migration scholarship, including concerns with the role of time in the governance of migrant bodies on the move as well as in the process of settlement; the impact of multiple regimes and logics of time on migrant biographies and everyday lived experiences, and the salience of policy timelines and timings to the structuring of migrants’ social relations and everyday lives and aspirations.

Birmingham, UK
November 2020

Nando Sigona

Nando Sigona is a Professor and the Director of the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRiS) and a Research Associate at the University of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre. His work investigates the migration and citizenship nexus. This is achieved through in-depth examination of a range of experiences of societal membership including, but not limited to, those of: EU families; refugees; Roma, undocumented migrants, racialized minorities, unaccompanied minors, dual citizens, 'failed' asylum seekers and stateless people. Nando is one of the founding editors of *Migration Studies, an International Academic Journal* published by Oxford University Press and the editor of the book series *Global Migration and Social Change* by Bristol University Press.

His recent work includes *Unravelling Europe's 'Migration Crisis'* (Policy Press, 2017), *Within and Beyond Citizenship* (Routledge, 2017), *The Oxford Handbook on Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2014) and *Sans Papiers: The Social and Economic Lives of Undocumented Migrants* (Pluto Press, 2014).

Acknowledgments

This book has been a long project in the making. When it began, we did not foresee the implications of a global pandemic, nor the exacerbated impacts this would have for people living within and between borders. As such, we are particularly thankful to all contributors who have worked to finalise *Stealing Time* under remarkable and—for us at least—unprecedented conditions.

We owe gratitude to many more, and so in alphabetic order we would like to thank: Dalia Abdelhady, Birkbeck Criminology Department, Border Criminologies, Mary Bosworth, Jon Burnett, DIGNITY—the Danish Institute Against Torture, Andrew Douglas, Liz Douglas, European Group for the Study of Deviance and Social Control, Igor Fink, Harm and Evidence Research Collaborative, Andrew Jefferson, Martin Joormann, Shahram Khosravi, Lisa Matthews, Migrant Artists Mutual Aid, Migration Mobilities Bristol, Ida Nafstad, Scott Poynting, Amina Rafique, Safety 4 Sisters, Ann Singleton, Statewatch, Trampoline House Copenhagen, Aaron Winter.

And of course—thanks, as always, to our families and friends.

About This Book

This book draws together empirical contributions which focus on conceptualising the lived realities of time and temporality in migrant lives and journeys. *Stealing Time* uncovers the ways in which human existence is often overshadowed by legislative interpretations of legal and illegalised. It unearths the consequences of uncertainty and unknowing for people whose futures often lay in the hands of states, smugglers, traffickers and employers that pay little attention to the significance of individuals' time and thus, by default, their very human existence.

Overall, the collection draws perspectives from several disciplines and locations to advance knowledge on how *temporal* exclusion relates to social and personal processes of exclusion. It begins by conceptualising what we understand by 'time', and looks at how temporality and lived realities of time combine for people during and after processes of migration. As the book develops, focus is trained on temporality and survival during encampment, border transgression, everyday borders and hostility, detention, deportation, and the temporal impacts of border deaths.

Stealing Time both conceptualises and realises the lived experiences of time with regard to those who are afforded minimal autonomy over their own time: people living in and between borders.

Introduction: Contested Temporalities, Time and State Violence

Time is an enigma. At once, time is something we can understand and agree on, and yet often have little conceptualisation of: it is our collective human existence, our daily lives and the years that go by. Time is history and it is the future, something we have watched over or wait to unfold. By all accounts, time in the every day is a simplistic notion that perhaps few of us stop to focus on. That is, until time becomes our ally or our enemy, something that we can control or lose all autonomy over.

The multifarious nature of time and temporalities have been explored and theorised by many social scientists, physical scientists and theorists as a social category (Durkheim, 1912, 2016) as experiential and culturally specific (Mead, 1932, 2002; Turner, 1967) and as a physical attribute inherent to evolution (Hawking, 1989). These have laid foundations for understanding what is meant by time, and if or how such a concept can ever be universal. However, as decolonial scholars have addressed, such constructions may not draw us to understanding how certain forms of time are perforated by globalised inequalities, exclusion and racialised forms of injustice (De Genova, 2002; El-Enany, 2020).

It is this aspect of time and temporality that this collection seeks to address, specifically in the context of migration. The idea for this book came about in early 2018 at a symposium at Birkbeck, University of London (Criminology Department).¹ The foundations were laid in discussions grappling with state power and control over migrant time, and how this is exercised in ways which seem unconnected to what might normatively be recognised as ‘time’. Rather than a universal or even culturally specific experience that is inherent to human existence, migrant time is regularly governed by policy, law and legislation, by militarised interference and patrols at national and international borders. It is bureaucratised in the every day through surveillant forms of governance which require migrants to ‘prove’ their right to move across borders or stay within borders (Abdelhady et al., 2020; Stumpf, 2011). It is visa applications, welfare applications, hours of asylum interviews. It is waiting for decisions and appointments, avoiding state actors and officials or facing them in banal and repetitive interviews.

As Melanie Griffiths has shown in depth, migrant time can be slow and monotonous, with days, weeks and even years passing in a sense of stuckness, waiting for papers or family reunifications. It might be in indefinite immigration detention, where (unlike prison) people count time up, rather than counting time down. It may then be frenzied—a quick dispersal or relocation to another house or part of the country, or a newly announced deportation with little time to gather ones thoughts or things, to say goodbye to loved ones or plan for what may come next (Griffiths, 2013, 2014; see also Canning et al., 2017; Stumpf, 2011; and Gomberg-Muñoz, and Silver et al., in this volume).

In short, migrant time is governed and human autonomy thus reduced. This power is exercised by states and their representatives, supranational states (such as the European Union) and—increasingly in the context of neoliberal governance—by corporations. It is therefore part of a micro, meso and macro web of actors and affiliates who collectively and individually seeks to determine the path that many people can go down, or not.

¹Organised by Monish Bhatia, Gemma Lousley and Sarah Turnbull, entitled *Borders, Racisms and Harms: A Symposium*. More information is available here: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/events/rem_ote_event_view%3Fid%3D466.

Our focus here is not on those with national identities that sit at the top of the Passport Index—dominated by European countries—the relatively rich traveller who is able to move quite freely and without significant risk. Rather we focus on those who are increasingly disenfranchised by intensified borders, including people who travel without papers/are undocumented; people who are forced to migrate due to persecution or conflict and may be seeking asylum; and those who fall under the broad umbrella of migrating for economic reasons. These are not monolithic or completely separate demographics, as is often presented. Instead, as McMahon and Sigona evidence (2018), individuals may have complex and multifaceted reasons for crossing borders, or indeed staying behind (see Schuster et al., this volume). In any case, we consider this juxtaposition of rights to be a toxic and (for many) lethal one: those who *least need* to cross borders—holiday travellers, financial elites and sun-seekers—are those with most ability and scope to do so, whilst those who may *most need* to for personal security or poverty alleviation are instead caught in nefarious bordered webs.

It is for this reason that we have titled this book *Stealing Time*. In the discussions at Birkbeck and since, we considered multiple angles from which we wish to conceptualise migration and temporality in the context of this collection. We drew first from Khosravi's earlier reflections on stolen time and the way in which temporalities are experienced in immigration detention, deportation and the fear of both (2016; 2018). As Khosravi noted, time is, for all of us, a form of capital that is unequally distributed in relation to rights and autonomy. This echoed well with how we perceive this particular liminal period. However, since *stolen* denotes something of the past, we moved to present this bureaucratically violent process in the active tense, and the here and now. That is, stealing time is a way to emphasise that such endeavours are not a thing of the past either in the global bordering sense or for people affected by bordering. It is active, deliberate and inherently harmful. Cohen and Taylor (1976) show us that time can be given as a punishment—time that belongs to someone else. For instance, those given custodial sentences have their time abstracted by courts and through the sanctioning of prison time. For people in such situations, time is not a resource but rather a controller. It is here also that the meaning of time becomes linked

to ongoing harm and criminality, since representations of illegal activity lay with migrants (Yahya, Chapter 2). And yet, as Bhatia (Chapter 9), Canning (Chapter 6) and Iliadou (Chapter 10) evidence, it is the lethal or harmful exercising of state power that aligns more accurately to mass atrocities such as deaths at borders, state inflicted death and temporal harm.

As such, this book invites the contributors and the reader to consider the actions—and inactions and omissions—of processes which reduce people's autonomy or sense of self, but whose control over temporality often remains in the hands of something much bigger than themselves. This structured reduction in autonomy should not be conflated with migrant agency. We do not contest that this exists through individual's lives and personal decisions, which is well evidenced in migrant solidarity platforms and acts of resistance (see for example Edward and Lindberg, this volume). Furthermore, we do not wish to force a unified collection within which all authors offer the same or even similar perspectives. Instead, we aim to *complicate* our collective understanding of time, temporalities, migration and state violence. It is for this reason that we have attempted to build a globalised perspective of the various ways in which time and temporalities relate to migration. As we will outline below when setting out the structure of this book, contributions focus on country contexts that take us through Afghanistan, Australia, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Jordan, Manus Island, Mexico, Sweden, Syria, Turkey and the USA. The chapters include contributions from people who have been held at or within borders, as well as who have researched the lived realities of border controls. It is a collection by activists, scholars, researchers and border crossers, and as such aims to provide a meaningful platform for which discussions regarding temporalities and the stealing of time can develop across these perceived boundaries.

Migratory Journeying and the Value of Migrant Lives

As we have hinted thus far, the complex nexus of time and space is felt differently across migratory journeys; from the first point of mobilisation, to the barriers and borders between reaching host or ‘safe’ countries. Even then, as sovereign states push further *towards* criminalising mobility and push *against* migrant rights and movement, ‘safe’ countries are increasingly safe in name only. The illegalisation of everyday rights such as accessible housing and work (Boochani, 2018; El-Enany, 2020; Mayblin, 2019), as well as the criminalisation of care and humanitarianism (Fekete et al., 2017), has increasingly made the lives of migrant populations more difficult, and in some places the facilitation of detention and deportations easier. Meanwhile, reductions in family reunification can leave loved ones stranded across countries and continents, where all concerned are unsure of how they can move forward, or if they ever will do so as a unit.

In capitalist societies, time is associated with money and success. Therefore, time is a form of capital, similar to money, which can be invested, saved or wasted (Cohen and Taylor, 1976). In this collection we ask what happens to the time people have spent in the countries, where they live deportable and liminal lives, or where they are deported from. For instance, long-term residents or even citizens (such as those belonging to the Windrush generation in Britain), who have worked, built networks, learned languages, paid taxes, fallen in love or had children, are routinely illegalised and sent to countries they may have little link with. The time people have *invested* to achieve these goals is lost by deportation. The time people have *spent* to accumulate social and cultural capital is thwarted by deportation. This is the stealing of time.

Migration can be perceived and studied as a spatial process, and the temporal aspects of migration have received much less attention. The everyday life of illegalised migrants and people seeking asylum is essentially characterised by waiting, either for papers, for people or for deportation. As Bourdieu highlighted, and from which Yahya draws in Chapter 2, ‘the all-powerful is he who does not wait but makes others wait... waiting implies submission’ (2000: 228). To keep people waiting is an exercise of power over other people’s time. We therefore suggest

that the temporal frame of migration and waiting is crucial to understanding what promotes social, political and economic ex/inclusion. The exclusion by current border regimes is not only spatial but also temporal; keeping people in prolonged waiting, depriving people of possibilities and embedding the loss of life chances.

Structure of This Book

This book draws together empirical contributions which focus on conceptualising the lived realities of time and temporality in migrant lives and journeys. *Stealing Time* uncovers the ways in which human existence is often overshadowed by legislative interpretations of ‘the legal’ and ‘the illegalised’. It unearths the consequences of uncertainty and unknowing for people whose futures often lay in the hands of states, smugglers, traffickers and employers that pay little attention to the significance of individuals’ time and thus, by default, their very existence.

This book aims to both realise the lived experiences of time with regard to those who are afforded minimal autonomy over their own time: people living in and between borders. Overall, this collection draws perspectives from several disciplines and locations to advance knowledge on how *temporal* exclusion relates to social and personal processes of exclusion. It begins by conceptualising what we understand by ‘time’, and looks at how temporality and lived realities of time combine for people during and after processes of migration. As the book develops, focus is trained on temporality and survival during encampment, border transgression, everyday borders and hostility, detention, deportation and ultimately border deaths.

Indeed, some focus more explicitly on how time is experienced by people affected by migration rather than people who are themselves mobilising. This is how the journey through this text begins. In Chapter 1, Liza Schuster, Reza Hussaini, Mona Hossaini, Razia Rezaie and Muhammad Riaz Khan Shinwari begin in Afghanistan, documenting the lives of people who are ‘left behind’ in the aftermath of family members and loved ones migrating. We are introduced to the gendered realities of Afghan migration, which sees predominately men

mobilise, and charts how time is stolen for women who are less likely to ‘move around’. As they show in both empirical and poetic depth, this waiting is sustained by hope: for reunification, to move themselves, or see their loved ones return.

In Chapter 2 we move from Afghanistan to Syria, where Karam Yahya journeys us through the decisions people make when crossing borders, and the endless boundaries one must overcome in going forward and whilst ‘stuck’ at camps. Drawing on his experience of first arriving in Jordan as an aid worker, and later when fleeing Syria, we see first-hand the relentless barriers that must be negotiated. But more than physical borders, Yahya exposes bordering as a *process*: not only during a journey, but a temporal engagement bound in social contracts that requires constant negotiation through bureaucratic complexities, lost time and Othering in host countries.

From here, Isabel Meier and Giorgia Donà take us through France, Germany and the UK where they document the implications of asylum regimes. Through their research across the three countries, they outline life narratives which focus on timescapes as a specific liminal experience for people seeking asylum: a process which draws out multiple temporalities—rather than fixed—documenting how these unfold through administrative, economic and affective practices and experiences. Importantly, Chapter 3 highlights ways in which certain aspects of human experience are intensified by these state-controlled temporalities, emphasising the harms of stress, loneliness and financial precarity.

Shifting to the Southern Hemisphere, Behrouz Boochani and Omid Tofighian train our gaze on what they term ‘the weaponization of time’ in Australian territories. Focussing on Boochani’s experience of six years held on Manus Island and in Manus Prison, and the endemic harms embedded in deterrence policies, Chapter 4 offers us a meticulous insight into the stealing of time as torture. Moreover, the dynamic between Boochani and Tofighian solidly introduces us to the value of organised resistance and solidarity across borders and bordering.

Chapter 5 moves our focus back into Northern Europe, where Stanley Edward and Annika Lindberg draw attention to the state implemented violence inherent to both immigration detention (in Sweden) and deportation centres (in Denmark). Highlighting these mechanisms as a form

of racialised global apartheid, Lindberg first highlights how hopes and dreams are manipulated in immigration detention as a means to motivate people who are detained to leave, whilst simultaneously stealing their time. In the second section, Edward outlines his own hopes against the deportation regime which held him in partial confinement in Denmark. As with Boochani and Tofighian, Edward's insight exemplifies the agency held by people to organise, and use hope against the very regimes which steal time. Whilst the Danish authorities aim to motivate people to leave through deportation centres, Edward uses hope as a motivation to persevere.

The focus on Northern Europe continues in Chapter 6 with Victoria Canning, who outlines the ways in which violent bureaucracies have intersectional impacts for survivors of violence. Drawing specifically on research in Britain, Denmark and Sweden, she outlines the lived experience of women who are trapped in temporal limbo, and the human cost of such existential confinement. Whilst asylum regimes may be harmful for all or most who pass through them, for survivors of sexualised or domestic violence the emotional impacts of previous traumas can be compounded by fears or threats of deportation or detention, lack of access to psychological support, and feelings of loss from the past or for the future. This infliction of autonomy harm, she argues, is the bureaucratised stealing of time.

From here, Chapters 7 and 8 complement each other in addressing the experiences of people who are returned from the United States to Mexico. In Chapter 7, Alexis Silver, Melissa Manzanares and Liron Goldring focus on young Mexican migrants who are returned or deported, and who face irrecoverable loss of time, social investment and—for some—money to enable the rebuilding of life elsewhere. They highlight how such significant changes to their social environment can result in culture shock, particularly for those who have spent many years (or even a majority of their life) in the USA. In Chapter 8, Ruth Gomberg-Moñoz draws us further into grasping the complexity of rebuilding one's life after deportation. She highlights that time is systematically wasted and efforts to rebuild life are stalled. Moreover, Gomberg-Moñoz invites us to consider

whether state negligence towards people who are deported is a consequence of bureaucratic failure, or a form of failed remitters in their nations of citizenship.

In Chapter 9, Monish Bhatia shifts our focus to the toxic residues of colonialism and Hindu nationalism in India. The chapter uncovers ongoing state-sanctioned killings across the Indo–Bangladesh borders—which he terms the violent stopping of migrant time. Bhatia further explores the contemporary internal bordering regime, citizenship practices and mass disenfranchisement and time theft of undocumented Muslims. Those who are illegalised increasingly find themselves in limbo, marginalised and even subject to confinement in detention centres. The chapter is dense and complex, and uncovers the historic past and the present anti-Muslim and xenophobic politics and practices in India.

The closing chapter of this collection takes us to Greece, and specifically the Greek Island of Lesbos. In a devastating indictment of the violence of the European Union's strategy towards militarised borders and deterrence of migrants, Evgenia Iliadou outlines the reality of death at Europe's borders. Reflecting on activist work and empirical research, she conceptualises thanatopolitical harms of governance when control is exercised in place of humanitarianism. In considering how push-backs facilitate deaths at sea, Iliadou addresses death as the politicised stealing of time, and of life. Moreover, such theft does not end there, but continues when bodies are not recovered, and dignity in death is often even withheld through burial for those whose bodies are recovered from the sea.

Final Note from the Editors

In all, this collection aims to encourage a complicated and critical sense of temporality that can place migrant lives as active agents, but which also facilitates a recognition that states and (increasingly) their corporate allies hold significant power over individual decisions, exclusions and life trajectories. Lives lost to borders are not only stolen, but violently stopped. This is the loss of friendships, family, love, birthdays, celebrations and everything else that forms much of human life. Above all we

ask you to consider this: as we stated earlier, what we do with our time is a form of capital, linked with our own perceptions of success or failure—it is unlike any other capital we possess. We may lose money or friends, and work to claim them back. We might lose a sentimental object that, in essence, cannot seem replaceable, but with which another can replace its function. But no matter how rich we are or what cultural capital we accumulate, we can never, ever re-accumulate time that is lost. That is a commodity that is out of human reach, and which for those most affected by bordering, is often stolen.

Monish Bhatia
Victoria Canning

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Notes on Contributors

Monish Bhatia is a Lecturer in Criminology at the Birkbeck, University of London—School of Law. His research interests lie in the areas of asylum, state racism and violence, specifically the treatment of individuals by the criminal justice and immigration systems. He has published several articles and chapters, and is the co-editor of *Media, Crime and Racism* (2018), *Critical Engagements with Border, Racisms and State Violence* (Critical Criminology, 2020), and *Race, Mental Health and State Violence* (Race & Class, 2021).

Behrouz Boochani is Adjunct Associate Professor of Social Sciences at UNSW, author and journalist and was incarcerated as a political prisoner by the Australian government on Manus Island and then held in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea). In November 2019 he escaped to New Zealand where he has been accepted as a refugee. His book *No Friend But the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (Picador, 2018) has won numerous awards including the 2019 Victorian Prize for Literature.

Victoria Canning is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Bristol. Her research and teaching interests lie in the areas of