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Displacement, Exile and Incarceration Commuted into Cinematic Vision

Omid Tofighian

Abstract: Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time *(Behrouz Boochani and Arash Kamali Sarvestani, 2017) is a documentary that exposes the systematic torture of refugees banished by the Australian Government to Manus Prison (in Papua New Guinea and officially called the Manus Regional Processing Centre). Shot clandestinely from a mobile phone camera by Boochani and smuggled out for codirection with Kamali Sarvestani, the film documents an important phase in the history of migration to Australia. This article analyses the film by foregrounding the experience of displacement, exile and incarceration as a unique cinematic standpoint. Boochani's cinematic vision and socio-political critique will be interpreted in terms of embodied knowing and his existential predicament. The symbiotic relationship between the experience of seeking asylum, exile, imprisonment and the filmmaking process raises critical questions regarding the film as anti-genre, common tropes used to define refugeehood, and the criteria necessary to interpret and evaluate cultural production created from this unique position. The article draws on theories pertaining to accented cinema and incorporates ideas from social epistemology. Furthermore, it considers the author's dialogue and collaboration with Boochani and Kamali Sarvestani and examines the significance of various contributors to the filmmaking process and cinematic vision.*

In 2017 the film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (Behrouz Boochani and Arash Kamali Sarvestani, 2017) had its world premiere at the Sydney Film Festival and its international premiere at the BFI London Film Festival.[1] Shot clandestinely inside the Manus detention centre by Behrouz Boochani using a mobile phone camera (Samsung Galaxy 6) and codirected with Arash Kamali Sarvestani using WhatsApp voice/text messaging, the film is a multidimensional meditation on torture and time. It is a profound form of truth-telling that confronts contemporary manifestations of colonial domination and subjugation, border violence and the exploitation of bodies made vulnerable by forced migration. The documentary exposes the systematic torture of refugees banished by the Australian government to an immigration detention centre on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and officially named the Manus Regional Processing Centre. Boochani—a writer and journalist who has been indefinitely detained on Manus Island for nearly six years—smuggled out the footage and arranged through a number of activists to send the shots to his codirector Kamali Sarvestani in the Netherlands. The film documents an important phase in the history of migration to Australia—phase two of the Pacific Solution and Operation Sovereign Borders (2012–2013 and 2013–present), which is an offshore detention regime originally established in 2001 (until 2008) to deter people from travelling to Australia by boat in pursuit of protection and freedom. It therefore obstructs their ability to exercise the right to seek asylum in Australia.[2]

In the following two sections, I draw on dialogue and collaborations between Boochani, Kamali Sarvestani and myself (as interpreter and subtitle creator) in order to explore further the interdependent connection between the carceral and the border in the film. Without ignoring political and ethical concerns, my interpretation of the collaborative filmmaking endeavour that produced *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* will be discussed with a focus on the filmic and epistemic aspects of the project in order to then raise questions about genre and other forms of

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classification. I first attempt to analyse the film in connection with Hamid Naficy's theory of accented cinema by foregrounding the combined experience of displacement, exile and incarceration. I explain how *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* can be read as part of the accented cinema category and draw on Asuman Suner's reading of Naficy to contextualise the aesthetic and epistemic value of the film within the reality of indefinite detention and the colonial nature of Australia's border politics. I then examine issues pertaining to categorisation using scholarship from social epistemology (Fricker; Medina, "Varieties") and propose ways to rethink generic classifications. I argue that the aforementioned factors conditioning Boochani's experience combine to produce a unique cinematic vision and epistemic position that complicates its generic placement. The many dimensions of Australian border violence infuse all aspects of the film and I show how the combination of displacement, exile and incarceration function to characterise the style, narrative and content of the film, as well as its production and reception.

Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time and Accented Cinema

Hamid Naficy has created a language for interpreting films made under the conditions of exile and diaspora: he uses the term accented cinema as a general category and explores the distinct features of films that pertain to exile, diaspora and postcoloniality. He creates three subgenres of cinema: 1) exilic, 2) diasporic and 3) postcolonial ethnic and identity. The filmmakers from all three groups reside in Western countries after leaving their homeland. "Exilic" filmmakers leave as a result of forced migration and remain ambivalent to both homeland and host country (Naficy 11–13). "Diasporic" directors maintain strong connections with their country of origin and draw strength from their roots (13–15). And "postcolonial ethnic and identity" directors represent the influence and role of more than one culture—the culture of their homeland is combined with other experiences and identities (15–17). The accent that the three subcategories share is not so much about the speech acts of the diegetic characters but the interstitial, artisanal and collective production modes of the filmmaker. In addition to being the creators of their cultural production, accented filmmakers perform their identities through their films (they are semiautobiographical), and their displacement also characterises the mode of production. As such, they signify and signify upon both the conditions of exile and diaspora cinema traditions (22). They engage with, rethink and transform national and global cinematic traditions by way of their particular modes of production, politics and aesthetics.

In order to clarify his designations, Naficy makes an important distinction between Third World cinema and accented cinema, with movement beyond the homeland characterising the latter. Naficy also analyses accented cinema as deterritorialised and, therefore, deeply concerned with place, space and time (through the development and various uses of chronotopes).[3] The notion of homeland is central and is often fetishised and imagined with a sense of nostalgia through nature symbols and cultural artefacts (12). In addition, claustrophobia and temporality are connected to narrative settings that represent confinement, control, panic and pursuit. Crossing borders and travel tropes are also prominent; movement is a guiding principle in these films and reflects themes of overcoming, transition, deliverance and striving to re-enter structure—revisiting home or finding home is a psycho-social experience that fuses physical travel with a mental and emotional quest (33).

Features such as open form, closed form and thirdspace chronotopes are particularly important for films pertaining to diaspora and exile since they enable new configurations of

space, time and lived experience to be evoked. Drawing on Luis Giannetti, Naficy argues that the open form style is "generally recessive, [and] appears to be spontaneous and accidental and can be associated with realism"; it therefore represents freedom (154). He states that the closed form is "conspicuous, [and] appears to be self-conscious and deliberate and may be associated with formalism"; it suggests determinacy (154). Closed form conveys control, distance and unfamiliarity; open forms communicate immediacy, intimacy and familiarity. According to Naficy, thirdspace chronotopes exhibit transitional and transnational spaces, connote journey and movement, and feature epistolarity.

Asuman Suner proposes that we reassess the critical value of accented cinema by shifting from the emphasis on the situatedness of the auteur, i.e. films specifically made by "displaced subjects and diasporized communities", to an appreciation of the critical positionality of the filmmaker (377). Within this new framework, it is not necessary that the accented auteur be resettled in a Western society. Instead, the defining factors would be twofold: 1) the ways the filmmakers "take questions of belonging and identity as their central problematic" and dedicate more attention to the issues of ethnic, gender and class divisions within national formations; and 2) the foregrounding of the dynamic way the production and reception processes for independent transnational cinema actually crosses national, regional and global spheres (379). Suner's critical reading of accented cinema facilitates a number of complex examinations of *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*. For one, Boochani has not been settled nor arrived in a destination country; that is, the film's codirector has yet to reach Australia or another third country. The film also delivers a strong decolonial stance and resistance to the border-industrial complex, which, in many ways, overshadows or goes beyond the emphasis on core accented features, such as collective and artisanal modes of production.

Suner critically assesses Naficy's subcategories of accented cinema by analysing three films that do not fall into the categories of exilic, diasporic or postcolonial ethnic, but share obvious affinities "with the 'accented genre' based on mode of production and reception, authorial inscription, thematic preoccupations and cinematic style" (375). Her suggestion is to broaden the notion of "accent" in terms of cinematic genre into what she calls "accented cinema at large" (375–9). This way, Suner argues, the concept can also apply to a more varied range of films that would otherwise be inaccurately labelled by ambiguous or outdated categories such as "world cinema", "Third World cinema", "Third Cinema" or "national cinema" (376–7). Suner's approach raises important questions about filmic categories and after analysing the accented qualities of *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* in the next section, I will suggest a number of ways to further the discussion by addressing some epistemic and ethical issues pertaining to classification.

After arriving in Australian waters seeking asylum by boat from Indonesia, Boochani was initially detained on Christmas Island (Australian territory). The Kurdish Iranian writer and journalist only remained on Australian soil for a one-month period before being exiled to Manus Island where he has been incarcerated for nearly six years at the time of this publication. His codirected film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is about the situation in the immigration detention centre but it also functions as a critique of the system, culture and ideology that underlies Western liberal democracies and their increasingly militarised and securitised border regimes. In terms of auteurship, style, content, production and distribution, *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* corresponds with the accented genre. The film is a philosophical meditation on, and penetrating examination of, the conditions inside what Boochani calls Manus Prison and the systematic torture inflicted on refugee men detained in the Australia-run offshore centre (men with families, women, children and unaccompanied minors are detained in Australia's

other offshore centre on Nauru). The film also intertwines particular themes of belonging and identity, but moves beyond a representation of Boochani's situatedness. The work of the two codirectors in tandem presents a complex political critique of the interlocking systems of oppression that condition the site, the bodies it contains and its strategic elimination of hope and closure.

The saturating nature and interconnection between offshore detention and the danger of forced return intensify the accented features of a film like *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* in particularly nuanced ways. The grafting of displacement, exile and incarceration within this context is manifest in, for instance, the clandestine nature of filming within a hyper-securitised borderland; the fraught communication between codirectors over WhatsApp; the secrecy surrounding the existence of the detention centre and the occurrences within it; the need to smuggle shots from Manus Island to the Netherlands; the oppressive tropical conditions and dilapidated dwellings; and legal restrictions and structural obstacles around distributing and promoting the film. Moreover, the indispensable themes of incarceration and deportation modify and transform the place and function of the other accented elements. Furthermore, the central roles occupied by indefinite detention and systematic torture determine the style, structure, content and mode of production, as I will show in the passages that follow.

The erasure or perverse manipulation of time (examples of systematic torture) gives rise to unique chronotopes in the film. The title refers to Chauka, a native bird exclusive to Manus Island and a symbol of belonging, identity and culture to Manusians. Chauka is sacred and means different things to the islanders; it is represented in folklore and songs as "a guide, a timekeeper and a voice of caution and forewarning" (Rooney). The bird adorns the Manus Island flag and its loud call signals when it is time to rise and also the end of the day. Lacking any understanding of and respect for the sanctity of the symbol and knowledge system connected to its cultural status, Australian authorities in the prison named one of the solitary confinement cells Chauka, a place where they disciplined recalcitrant refugees. In the film Kamali Sarvestani and Boochani introduce Chauka to function as a hologram: on the one hand, the symbol is employed to acknowledge Manusian culture and knowledge and act as a heuristic device to critically analyse colonial interventions on the island, particularly by the Japanese and US during the Second World War; the symbol of Chauka, on the other hand, is also instrumental in demonstrating examples of neocolonial domination and subjugation by Australians in the prison and how the dimension of time is leveraged as an instrument of torture by the policy of indefinite detention. Although the bird is never seen in the movie—only its call is edited to sound throughout the film—Chauka is employed to represent a particular configuration of space and time. It is a chronotope that, from one angle, exhibits the sanctity and identity of the Manusian people, their history and their connection to land; the other perspective represented by the Chauka chronotope is the many years of exile and indefinite detention of refugees in a remote extrajudicial site.

In fact, the colonial history of Manus Island provides an indispensable contextual backdrop for analysing the multilayered political dimensions of the film, the situation of Boochani as an imprisoned refugee exiled by Australia, and the restrictions hindering the collaborations. The current refugee detention centre is part of a legacy of incarceration, colonial exploitation and geopolitical machinations. Manus Island (and Nauru) is the location for the first phase of Australia's Pacific Solution (introduced by the Liberal Howard government) and the second phase (reintroduced by the Labour Gillard and Rudd governments). Prior to this, for most of the twentieth century, the region now known as Papua New Guinea was an Australian colony. In the 1960s Indonesia was preparing a military takeover of the former Dutch New

Guinea, which was then recognised by many in the international community as part of Indonesia by 1969. Approximately fifty years ago Australia imprisoned West Papuan refugees (also known as West Irians) on Manus Island when they crossed into the then Australian colony for protection against the Indonesian takeover. The site was referred to as the Salasia Camp; remnants of this site remain in the same town as the three current Australia-run detention centres. During the fighting, Australia turned away many West Papuan refugees. But from among the small numbers who were permitted entry and then sent to Manus Island, some still reside there with their families (PNG has only begun granting citizen status and rights). In the early twentieth century Australia seized control, the Japanese empire tried to invade the region and then they vied for control of several islands (including Manus) with Australian and US forces during the Pacific War. In the nineteenth century parts of the territory were controlled by the German and British empires. Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975.



Figure 1: Janet, Poruan "Sam" and Clement: Discussing Chauka, Manusian identity and coloniality in *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (Boochani and Kamali Sarvestani, 2017). Sarvin Productions, 2017. Screenshot.

The natural and built environments impact the lived experience of detained refugees in defining ways and this carries through to the filmmaking. The film begins with a black screen and the sound of the sea. A message appears stating, "This film was shot clandestine [*sic*] with a mobile phone at Manus detention centre in Papua New Guinea", and the waves are interrupted by bells and a distorted wind sound. This is immediately followed by a long shot of a serene shore lined with coconut trees and other vegetation, giving the impression of an idyllic setting. Birds scatter suddenly. Alongside the sound of the sea in the background and the picturesque view, a piano and cello enter creating a moody effect; one is reminded that the camera is filming from within the prison even though the cage is not present in the frame. Then, a locally employed prison guard fixes a heavy lock and we see various shots of Manusian and Australian guards within the prison—a fluorescent reflective work vest, guard uniforms, metal cages and gates, plastic dumpster, plastic chairs. The film cuts to the sea with islands in the distance. The camera then pans to the side revealing the position of the cameraman inside the cage. The music

ends as the camera films a high-fence corridor separating the natural scenery from the detention centre, and we are left with the same distorted wind sound while Chauka calls in the background. Now, a mid-shot of local children sitting on the base of a large tree, again filmed from within the prison without the cage in the frame.

The film is marked by the situatedness of the refugees, the interdependent nature of thinking and creating within the prison, and the logic of the detention system. *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is defined by critical analysis of the Australian border regime;the embodied encounters within the confined, indeterminate and indefinite nature of the predicament; and the restricted and oppressive interactions between detainees and detention centre staff, guards and immigration officials. A number of people in the film exemplify some of the most brutal encounters with Australia's carceral system of border control and its perverse forms of treatment. As reflections of the space–time dimensions in the film, the two testimonies below are left unfinished and are followed by long shots of the prison spaces—decrepit, makeshift containers, and scattered plastic chairs within fenced enclosures and covered by tarpaulin canopies—giving a sense of indeterminacy.

The first voices we hear in the film are of Manusian youth who are part of what seems to be a church group singing a hymn. Seconds later the film presents a voiceover monologue by a detainee who once had his throat cut by a guard; he describes Chauka, the solitary confinement cell inside the detention centre:

> There were four CCTV cameras, and four rooms. As if the daily harassment wasn't enough they would also come here to harass me. They came in and sat right in front of me, they wouldn't even let me sleep. […] Life is just reduced to being filmed, being watched by officers, harassment, beating people to the ground, handcuffing people.

Another detainee interviewed while in his cramped room describes Chauka, emphasising the militarised nature of the confinement:

> The worst days in the camp for me were in Chauka. The atmosphere is extremely horrific [...] there were forty people held in twenty square meters. Forty people. We would sleep on the cement floor. On the cement there were no mats or anything. Nothing. Even the toilet was in the same CIs, in a holding cell with forty people. After a few days, it was there where they harassed us—like no toilet breaks. Then after three to four days, they brought a toilet cubicle. There were no showers. After some days someone took us to the sea to bathe. They said go there with a guard with guns. Just go there and take a bath in the ocean.

Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time exhibits many of the stylistic and formal features outlined by Naficy and qualifies as an example of accented cinema. For instance, a number of characters in the film are Kurdish and the Kurdish language is one of the main languages in the film (in addition to Farsi, the local language from Manus Island, English and the use of some terms from Tok Pisin (the creole language of PNG)). The Kurdish flag is seen in the background of a number of shots behind one of the characters, painted on one of the doors to the rooms. Kurdish brotherhood is a strong element in *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* and is represented in three situations: 1) when Kurdish refugees meet in a room to write a letter and prepare a package of items to send to the mother of Reza Barati, a Kurdish refugee killed on Manus Island by guards during a riot in 2014; 2) when a Kurdish refugee recalls the murder of Barati, the threats he has received after testifying and pursuing justice, and his strong sense of

responsibility; and 3) the stirring and mournful singing of a Kurdish ballad by another refugee about homeland and martyrdom as his friends listen and contemplate.





Figure 2 (above): Stripping away dignity: beds, heat and sweat in *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*.
Figure 3 (below): Fences and coconut trees: prison and nature in *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time.*
Sarvin Productions, 2017. Screenshots.

The themes in *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* pertaining to journeying pervade but remain distant and suppressed (they are alluded to as a potential prequel or sequel). The indispensable relationship between void and temporality and the film's overbearing confinement tropes both relate to indefinite detention and erase possibilities and hopes for

purposeful movement. This point, in particular, reflects the reality of Australia's border politics, which arranges and confines the constellation of cultural and political references; for imprisoned refugees expressions or symbols of nostalgia function only as instruments to cope or resist within the caged enclosure, and the elimination of time instils a distinct quality to the feeling of exile (the prisoners/refugees' isolation or state of exclusion on Manus Island disallows a coherent, established and thriving sense of a diasporic community even though the men are held there with their compatriots).

Significant elements pertaining to the film's style and the use of tropes align with fundamental points from Naficy's classifications. For Naficy, chronotopical representations in accented films illuminate the importance of place, and the depiction of spaces invites different encounters with time. In *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* representations of place manifest in peculiar and idiosyncratic ways. The shadow of the colonial imaginary is represented by the combination of the refugee prison and the status of Manus Island as a colonial garrison still dependent on a colonial master. This point is solidified in the film when two Manusian men (Poruan "Sam" Malai and Clement Soloman) describe the role of Manus Island during the Second World War and Australia's current machinations and secrecy regarding the detention centre. In order to depict this connection, many scenes in the film blend open form and closed form visuals and thirdspace chronotopes: the sea and jungle/cages; open skies and jungle/dilapidated containers and rooms; the sea, sky and scattered coconut trees/closed-off roads, fences and vehicle enclosures; exits into jungle and open skies/guarded or fenced paths, corridors; children playing amongst nature/empty or sparsely occupied prison spaces. By using visual forms in this way the film enforces the notion that immigration detention and the island's natural environment are both under the dictates of coloniality.[4] This technique reduces the open spaces of the island to the claustrophobic spaces within the refugee prison; and, conversely, it projects the closed spaces inside the detention centre onto a larger, enduring colonial story. These spatial representations correspond with the temporal dimensions of the situation on Manus Island. For the refugees, time stands still in the prison; and even though Chauka tells Manus locals the time, very little has changed on the island since independence. Both spaces exist outside of time and within the same colonial schedule.

The following comments are Boochani's analysis of a prominent and idiosyncratic trope in the film—and the theme of the opening long shot—which communicates the simultaneous experiences of displacement, exile and incarceration together with the feeling of being drowned or saturated by transhistorical and transnational colonial oppression:

> The mosquito killer fogging machine was used every day except for when it rained. The fogging usually began around sunset and conducted all over the prison—in our rooms […] everywhere. When the pest exterminator visits the prison everyone escapes. The smell is horrible and harmful to our health. He just comes in unannounced, wearing his mask. He has no concern for anyone here. You may be sleeping and have to jump out of bed and escape. This kind of fogging is done to kill mosquitoes and for about half an hour or one hour a thick cloud hovers over the entire camp. It's deeply depressing. It's extremely difficult having to live with that experience every day. IHMS [International Health and Medical Service] said they will request that they stop this practice but nothing has happened. They are simply doing this to harm us. The cloud that develops during this time makes the prison look like the aftermath of a bombing, it transforms the prison into a kind of warzone. By doing this they are telling us to go […] to go back to where we came from. For them we are like mosquitoes and they are trying to get rid of us. (Q&A)

In the next section I explore the need to interpret the nuances reflected in the above passage, and throughout *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* in the context of film classifications—particularly in relation to accented cinema categories. I draw on my earlier examination of specific details and tropes pertaining to refugees on Manus Island and examine the possibilities and importance of rethinking categories.

Reconsidering Generic Categories: Rethinking Carceral-Border Interconnections

Since Miranda Fricker introduced the concept of epistemic injustice in her influential book of the same title, a series of philosophical debates have ensued regarding the nuances and multiple forms of structural oppression that affect knowers (Medina, *Epistemologies*; Pohlhaus; Dotson, "Cautionary" and "Conceptualising"; Anderson; Cooper). One form of epistemic injustice formulated by Fricker is hermeneutical injustice, a form of harm that occurs when the collection of accepted and available epistemic resources is unfairly constructed so that it marginalises and excludes particular social-cultural identities. Under the conditions of hermeneutical injustice, it is disproportionately more difficult for certain people to interpret their place in society and to understand and define their encounters with the world. This injustice is systemic in that the disadvantages and harms are built into the structure of human interactions and socio-cultural practices, and the damage occurs even when we cannot identify individual perpetrators—the problems are pervasive, ingrained and systematic, and the structures are often invisible (Fricker 159, 163). Within complex, interlocking systems of power and suppression, particular epistemic agents are wronged because of the discriminatory nature of knowledge production, which undermines or dismisses their contributions, thus creating a system that does not reflect their social experiences by creating an obfuscating and exclusory language for understanding and expressing themselves, and denying them participation in meaning-making and meaning-sharing processes.

Building on Fricker's work, José Medina associates the capacity to express oneself and to be understood with human dignity (Medina, "Varieties" 41). As a form of epistemic injustice, hermeneutical injustice can damage one's sense of self and one's potential to participate in the meaning-making and meaning-sharing endeavours that constitute a dignified existence. Recognition of this kind of epistemic damage is crucial in the context of interpreting accented cinema. The creative, intellectual and communicative apparatus made available as a result of Naficy's scholarship may be interpreted as a response to epistemic injustice. The categories of accented cinema create a theoretical and socio-cultural language that enables us to envisage distinctive styles of cinema (with their own characteristics and purpose) that emphasise the situatedness of the auteur. The creation of intellectual and creative space for the indicators that constitute exilic, diasporic and postcolonial ethnic and identity filmmaking functions in many meaningful scholarly and political ways. Recognising these forms of accented cinema refines our understanding of a significant collection of films. However, it also generates a discourse of resistance against homogenising tendencies within interpretative practices. Therefore, the language and theory pertaining to accented cinema creates new possibilities for expression and interpretation for those who have endured displacement and exile; in other words, accented cinema has value for those facing epistemic injustice.

However, as Medina points out, different examples of hermeneutic injustice necessitate different responses and are associated with different responsibilities. He makes a distinction between "*non-fatal* hermeneutical injustices" and those resulting in "*hermeneutical death*" (Medina, "Varieties" 41–2; emphasis in original). Some instances are so damaging that a

person's epistemic capacity to engage in the social activity of knowledge production in meaningful and dignified ways is stripped, their capacities diminished and any form of consequential status denied.

In response to hermeneutical injustice, particularly the fatal examples that Medina identifies, it would be unproductive to encourage action that focuses on individual responsibility. The appropriate way to find solutions to systemic forms of injustice is by considering collective and shared forms of responsibility. Within a divisive and hostile society, the dominant and historically privileged culture is necessarily complicit in the marginalisation, stigmatisation and exclusion of particular subjectivities, groups and publics because of how they inherit, benefit from and uphold the norms and institutions that make injustice possible (Medina, "Varieties" 42). Therefore, transformation requires extending and expanding the diagnosis by addressing the people involved in structural oppression as well as the dynamic ways that it takes place; examining the different contexts in which injustice occurs and its purposes; and questioning why some people and groups are left out as progress is being made (Dotson, "Cautionary" and "Conceptualising"; Pohlhaus).

Drawing upon the framework of hermeneutical injustice discourse, it may be necessary to think through different categories when engaging with films that are characterised by the intersection of displacement, exile and incarceration. The potential for detainees or former detainees to produce more films such as *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is increasing. The rise of a particular kind of aggressive and xenophobic border politics and racist manifestations of nationalism are deeply intertwined with the expansion of privately-run immigration detention centres. In addition, recent developments in phone technology allow for clandestine video recording and new communication applications now have the capacity to transfer information globally. If more films such as *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* are produced, then a reconsideration of classifications such as accented cinema is necessary, as is rethinking the role of incarceration and border violence in relation to cinematic visions. A subgenre that prioritises both the carceral and the border will be helpful when determining the nature of films characterised by displacement, exile and incarceration (carceral-border cinema). Medina's proposal regarding a richer and broader conceptual toolbox for classifying varieties of hermeneutical injustice resonates well with this suggestion:

> Classifications are useful for what they enable us to accomplish; they are not simply an idle academic exercise of intellectual dexterity; they are rather, a conceptual exercise that enable us to navigate the world and to find ways to change it [...] it would be advantageous to avail ourselves of as many classifications as possible so that we can highlight different elements and dimensions in the phenomenology of hermeneutical wrongs committed against individuals, groups, and publics. ("Varieties" 45)

Medina continues by offering four distinct angles or parameters that are important for classifying the heterogeneous phenomenon of hermeneutical injustice. He suggests aspects worthy of deeper consideration when reconsidering more accurate categories: source (semantically produced and performatively produced); dynamics (structural dynamics, institutional dynamics or interpersonal dynamics); breadth (how far across the social fabric); and depth (extent of harm) ("Varieties" 45–8). A more robust analysis of films made in and about immigration detention will need to account for these parameters and express an aesthetic and ethical openness to more nuanced categories; in fact, Medina's approach to classification creates spaces for new or previously neglected forms of art to find validation.

If we consider the relationship between the film and the colonial nature of Australia's border politics new possibilities for reclassification emerge. Although the identities of the codirectors are inscribed in the film, *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is profoundly committed to exposing and documenting many aspects of the colonial and neocolonial history of the island (which involves the Australian-run detention centre as a contemporary manifestation of Australia's colonial legacy); all filming takes place either in the prison or in particular parts of the island, and two local Manusians feature prominently in the film (Paruan and Clement) to discuss their indigenous heritage and provide a critique of coloniality with an emphasis on the Second World War and the present situation:

> Janet: So, the Japanese landed and they took the locals, and… ?
> Paruan: They were the first ones to use the locals to fight against the Americans. They prepared them to fight against the Americans. But then when the Americans arrived, they had to take those locals out from the Japanese area.
> Janet Galbraith: How did the locals feel?
> Paruan: [...] So when they see the plane coming, they don't know whether it's Japanese or the Americans, or what, but they have to run for their life.

When made aware of the torture inflicted on refugees in the prison camp and the use of the name Chauka to label the solitary confinement cell, Paruan responds with anger and frustration. Janet Galbraith facilitates the interview with Paruan and Clement who raise concerns about the wellbeing and future of the imprisoned refugees. Paruan and Clement recognise the lack of transparency in Australia's offshore detention program, identify the misreporting of Australian news, and express a nuanced understanding of the economic factors and power hierarchies determining how the centre is run and why the brutal treatment of innocent people has yet to be exposed in any meaningful way. Considering these factors, the film blurs the boundaries between Third World cinema, Third Cinema and accented cinema (Shohat and Stam). Again, the omnipresence of the prison–frontier unity conditions every narrative sequence and analytical commentary. The prison–frontier trope permits the exilic, diasporic and decolonial to align within one project. In this respect, *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is on the cusp of Third World cinema and accented cinema. There is a peculiar form of liminality associated with Boochani, his collaboration with Kamali Sarvestani, the characters, location and the politics at the core of the situation. Here, liminality is prolonged, indeterminate and indefinite; degrading, grim and morbid factors that justify a reconsideration of categories. As I have argued elsewhere, "[p]ositionality and context determine what one knows and how one knows it, and Boochani's circumstances are so remarkably distinct and extraordinarily horrific that radically new sets of concepts, methods and criteria are required for interpretation" (Tofighian, "Behrouz Boochani" 534).

Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time is characterised by the combination of displacement and exile with incarceration, and also the threat of refoulement (systematic forms of persecution by the host country after asylum seekers flee their homeland, and in the case of Boochani the detention is indefinite). By virtue of these complex features, *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* opens up new ways to engage with categories such as accented cinema and Third World cinema. First, the film is shot on location and codirected from Manus Island in PNG, where Boochani is currently still held indefinitely. The uncertainty and anguish pertaining to Boochani's present and future citizenship status are determined by prolonged and indeterminate liminality, and this state is exemplified by three factors: the impossibility for most refugees to return to their source country; the pressure by the Australian government on refugees to accept settlement in PNG; and the restrictions placed by Australia on the

incarcerated refugees regarding any future entry into Australia (the Australian government also refused an offer by New Zealand to resettle a significant number of refugees from Manus and Nauru, arguing that this opportunity could be used as a way to enter Australia at a later stage). According to these conditions, *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* stands astride Third World cinema and accented cinema in important ways, but it also complicates both labels. As filmmaker, Boochani's nationality becomes a floating signifier—is he a Kurdish filmmaker, an Iranian filmmaker, a PNG filmmaker, or an Australian filmmaker? Third World or accented? The question also arises regarding the role of Kamali Sarvestani, the European-based codirector: would it be fair to classify the film based solely on the fact that Kamali Sarvestani is a diasporic filmmaker? The centring of the carceral factor and the reality of border violence raises different sets of questions and introduces multidimensional approaches for interpreting the positionalities of collaborating filmmakers and their vastly different situations.

There is also an issue regarding the collective mode of production: in many cases people held in offshore immigration detention do not have the support of the immigrant communities of which they aspire to be a part (often the centres are isolated, difficult to access with little information available and limited media coverage). The making of *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* did not benefit from the collective mode of production that many accented films enjoy—it was never financially aided and, following its release, it has not necessarily benefited from the attendance of diasporic and exile communities. Since a strong showing at film festivals and public screenings, the film has attracted extremely low interest with only a small number of views through Vimeo streaming. It seems *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is not marginal or interstitial in the same way accented cinema is—the film has in fact experienced various forms of exclusion and dismissal. Naficy's rewording of Gayatri Spivak's question is more pronounced in this instance: the question becomes, "Can the subaltern be heard?" (Naficy11). *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is in competition with the many diverse voices that interact and conflict on the topics of border politics and the representation of refugeehood.

The investigation of the film's distinctive style and production process and the positionality of the auteurs and collaborators is, therefore, an issue of justice. The production of *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* and its cinematic vision, style and content are infused by the ethos of the prison, the weight of coloniality and the broader, violent, border–industrial complex. Examination and formulation of new concepts and ideas produce new knowledge; therefore, if we are to centre the social and political dimensions of epistemology a discussion about classifying and interpreting *Chauka* becomes a discourse about epistemic injustice and knowledge–power configurations (Medina, *Epistemologies*; Denzin et al.; Smith; Cooper).

Classification and epistemic justice are also relevant to interpreting labels used for distribution. When pitching the film for festivals the two directors discussed at length the problems regarding which national cinema to use as label: Papua New Guinean, Australian, Dutch, possibly Iranian? In my conversations with Kamali Sarvestani, he explained the complexity associated with designating the country to be credited for producing the film. The first important point to consider is how the festival circuit often determines the country of origin of the film; the questions each festival asks often differ. The film is officially produced in the Netherlands since the production company (Sarvin Productions) is registered there. Classification based on the production company is common and many festivals ask for the country of production. Some festivals do not ask—in these cases there is no need to register the country. By country of origin some festivals actually mean the countries relevant to location, funding and company. Some festivals ask for both company and production. Usually, the country of origin is a legal issue and the requirement is that the location of the production

company must be used for registration, even though there is nothing about the Netherlands represented in *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*. Kamali Sarvestani has never been to PNG, and Boochani has never been to the Netherlands.

Sometimes a film is transnational in that the funding comes from one place, the producer from another and it is shot in a different country. There are festivals that allow all three countries to be included, or in some cases only the first two. Some films may include up to six countries or more to represent everyone involved (possibly all the different funding sources); the origin of the film includes all of them. Many of these films will not mention the country where the filming took place. For *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time*, clearly, the Netherlands is one of the countries—or in some cases the only country—that will define the origin of the film since the codirector Kamali Sarvestani is a Dutch citizen and his production company is Dutch. Iran is not counted even though both directors are Iranian, much of the film is in Farsi, and Boochani's only nationality at this time is officially Iranian (he has been accepted as a refugee but has not been offered any form of visa anywhere and cannot return to Iran). The codirectors debated whether to include Australia since the film is about Australia. There was also a lot of assistance from Australians to smuggle the footage out of PNG and to the Netherlands—most of it was distributed from Australia after supporters returned home from Manus Island. There was no financial contribution from anywhere, but a lot of personal funds were spent and in-kind support was provided by Australians and others to assist in the making (also, the final scene is from the programme *Q&A* [ABC TV] and features the now former Prime Minister). There was a lot of discussion about including PNG amongst the countries since the entire film was shot there. For the festivals that were open to countries other than the location for the production company, the codirectors registered the Netherlands, PNG and also Australia. The exception was when the film had its world premiere in Sydney. Kamali Sarvestani, who attended, was advised not to list Australia because of legal issues that the film may face if registered as (jointly) Australian. Therefore, in Australia, *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* was registered as a Dutch and PNG film; in the UK, for its international premiere, it was a Dutch, PNG and Australian film. However, the codirectors consider the film to belong to all three countries (they are disinterested in including Iran since both have fraught relationships with their country of origin and complex traumatic histories).

Conclusion

"What is more horrific: immigration detention centres constructed as anomalies of liberal democracy, or systematic torture imagined as something distinct from fascism?" (Tofighian, "Writing"). *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* disrupts narratives of forced migration and reveals the many distinctions between exilic experiences. A cinema genre that best describes the style and content of *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* may be forthcoming: the inscription of an auteur's combined experience of displacement, exile and incarceration invites a reconsideration of established classifications, and it also represents a new way of knowing in the context of government technologies of border control. The film's mode of production was also impacted by the border–industrial complex and the unique positionality of Boochani deconstructs common frameworks used to interpret and define refugeehood. These factors inspire a new scheme for reading films emerging from prisons that have been constructed to contain human beings seeking asylum.

The uniquely political and cultural elements pervading and driving *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* convey the colonial history, neocolonial forms of domination, and the

idiosyncrasies of human beings held in indefinite detention and subject to systematic torture. Sensitivity towards the carceral factor in the film and current Australian border politics opens up new knowledge spaces for interpreting other emerging forms of communicative practice conditioned by the border–industrial complex.

Notes

1 *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* is available to watch on *Vimeo*: vimeo.com/ondemand/chauka.

2 The main location of the film is the original prison that held the refugees and asylum seekers for four and a half years. It was destroyed after they were forcibly evicted and then relocated to three smaller prison camps in November 2017 (Boochani, "This").

3 See Mikhail Bakhtin's important study "Forms of Time" for the original account of the concept and details for its use. Scholars, particularly of literature and film, have drawn on Bakhtin's insights in relation to representations of space and time in order to understand significantly different attitudes, thoughts and interpretations pertaining to and conditioned by these concepts which emanate from particular cultural and ethical imaginaries and specific lived experiences and positionalities. As such, literature and film may be interpreted for their epistemic function and role in contributing to many diverse and influential forms of knowledge production.

4 "Coloniality" (sometimes phrased "coloniality/modernity") is a concept that describes colonialism not as an event but as a pervasive structure and perpetual process. Aníbal Quijano introduced the term and it was developed further by other decolonial thinkers.

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