



## Responsibility in Limbo: Benningtonian Ethics and Boochani's Manus Island Testimony

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**Abstract :** Asylum systems often function as sites of biopolitical control, where states regulate the lives, bodies, and movements of refugees while simultaneously failing to provide protection or recognition. This paper applies Geoffrey Bennington's deconstructive ethics to examine how ethical responsibility emerges precisely in these gaps, where legal certainty and formal structures collapse. Bennington demonstrates that law cannot stabilize ethics; responsibility arises in the void created by structural failure. Using Behrouz Boochani's memoir *No Friend But the Mountains*, which chronicles his detention as a Kurdish refugee on Manus Island, this study explores how the suspension of legal and social recognition produces zones of vulnerability and liminality. Boochani's narrative not only documents bureaucratic and systemic failure but also enacts ethical witnessing, compelling readers to acknowledge the human consequences of legal and biopolitical suspension. By situating the text within a biopolitical framework inspired by Michel Foucault, the paper shows how asylum operates as both a mechanism of control and a space where ethical responsibility is provoked. The analysis highlights the interplay between law, care, and narrative, arguing that refugees' experiences reveal the moral imperative to respond ethically to life under structural suspension. This study contributes to refugee studies, legal and literary ethics, and deconstruction by demonstrating how ethical responsibility is enacted in spaces where law and governance fail, offering a fresh theoretical lens for understanding asylum, liminality, and the human stakes of bureaucratic power.

**IndexTerms:** Refugees, Asylum, Biopolitics, Ethical Responsibility, Geoffrey Bennington, Manus Island, Legal Liminality, Testimony, Bureaucratic Failure, Narrative Witnessing.

Contemporary refugee regimes operate within a paradoxical space where legal systems, humanitarian discourse, and administrative governance converge yet consistently fail to stabilize human life. Refugees are subjected to dense bureaucratic procedures, surveillance, and regulation, while simultaneously remaining excluded from durable legal recognition and social belonging. These conditions do not represent temporary breakdowns or accidental oversights within otherwise functional systems; rather, they are structurally produced zones of suspension in which the management of life replaces the promise of protection. Asylum, in this sense, functions less as a mechanism of refuge than as a technology of containment, regulating bodies and populations while deferring ethical and political responsibility. The persistence of prolonged detention, indefinite waiting, and juridical liminality across global asylum systems exposes a fundamental contradiction: states exercise profound control over refugee lives while refusing the obligations that such control ethically entails.

This contradiction is starkly visible in the offshore asylum regime established by Australia on Manus Island, where refugees were detained for years under conditions of legal indeterminacy, spatial confinement, and administrative delay. Designed to deter unauthorized maritime arrivals, the Manus Island detention center exemplified a form of governance that preserved biological life while systematically eroding political agency, dignity, and social recognition. Refugees held on the island were neither fully inside nor entirely outside the law: they were processed, monitored, and managed through legal and bureaucratic procedures, yet denied the protections those procedures ostensibly promised. This form of detention reveals asylum as a biopolitical apparatus, one that sustains life at the level of survival while rendering it perpetually precarious. The ethical stakes of such governance cannot be understood solely through legal analysis or humanitarian critique; they demand an interrogation of how power, responsibility, and moral obligation operate precisely where law fails to secure protection.

This paper approaches asylum as a biopolitical site through the theoretical framework developed by Michel Foucault, whose concept of biopolitics illuminates how modern states govern populations by regulating bodies, health, movement, and time. Foucault's analysis shifts attention away from sovereign power understood as the right to kill, toward forms of administrative power that manage life through institutional routines, surveillance, and procedural control. Within asylum systems, this mode of power becomes acutely visible: refugees are subjected to medical assessments, spatial restrictions, and prolonged processing,

transforming their lives into objects of administrative calculation. Yet while Foucault's framework powerfully exposes the mechanisms through which asylum governs life, it remains largely silent on the ethical implications of such governance. Biopolitics explains how life is managed, but not how responsibility emerges when that management produces suffering, neglect, and abandonment under the guise of legality.

To address this ethical dimension, the paper turns to the deconstructive ethics of Geoffrey Bennington, whose work challenges the assumption that responsibility can be grounded in law, rules, or institutional frameworks. Bennington argues that ethical responsibility does not arise from stable systems of moral or legal certainty; rather, it emerges precisely in moments of rupture, failure, and indeterminacy, where established structures prove incapable of protecting human life. Ethics, in this view, is not a codifiable obligation but an unavoidable demand provoked by the collapse of formal guarantees. When law suspends recognition, when administrative systems manage life without securing care or justice, responsibility does not disappear—it intensifies. Bennington's framework thus provides a crucial lens for understanding asylum not merely as a failed legal system, but as a space where ethical obligation is produced by the very inadequacy of law itself.

This theoretical convergence finds its most compelling articulation in the memoir *No Friend But the Mountains* by Behrouz Boochani, written during his detention on Manus Island. Boochani's text is not simply a personal narrative of suffering; it is a sustained act of ethical witnessing produced within a zone of biopolitical control and legal collapse. Composed under conditions of surveillance, restriction, and uncertainty, the memoir documents the lived realities of detention while simultaneously exposing the structural failures that render such realities possible. Boochani does not appeal to law for validation; instead, his narrative confronts readers with the ethical demand generated by the absence of protection, recognition, and accountability. In doing so, the memoir transforms silence, delay, and administrative neglect into sites of moral address, compelling attention where institutional frameworks refuse responsibility.

This paper argues that asylum, as exemplified by Manus Island, must be understood as both a biopolitical mechanism of control and a zone of ethical provocation. While Foucault's concept of biopolitics reveals how asylum regulates and manages refugee life, Bennington's deconstructive ethics illuminates how responsibility emerges from the failures of that regulation. Boochani's memoir occupies the intersection of these frameworks, demonstrating how literary testimony can enact ethical responsibility within spaces of structural abandonment. By analyzing *No Friend But the Mountains* through this dual theoretical lens, the paper reframes asylum not as a legal category alone, but as a moral terrain shaped by the tension between administrative power and ethical obligation.

The paper proceeds in four sections. The first elaborates the combined theoretical framework of biopolitics and deconstructive ethics, emphasizing their productive tension rather than their compatibility. The second examines Manus Island as a biopolitical site, analyzing how detention produces legal liminality and structural vulnerability through administrative governance. The third offers a close reading of Boochani's memoir, focusing on narrative form, silence, and testimony as modes of ethical witnessing. The final section considers the broader implications of this analysis for refugee studies, literary ethics, and contemporary understandings of responsibility under conditions of systemic failure. Through this structure, the paper advances a central claim: that ethical responsibility in asylum contexts is not grounded in law or humanitarian promise, but emerges in the very spaces where such frameworks collapse.

The concept of biopolitics, as developed by Michel Foucault, offers a critical framework for understanding how modern states exercise power not primarily through overt coercion or sovereign violence, but through the regulation and administration of life itself. Biopolitical power operates through institutions, procedures, and norms that organize populations by managing health, movement, productivity, and survival, rendering life legible to bureaucratic and administrative systems. In this model, power does not simply exclude or repress; it categorizes, monitors, and optimizes, producing subjects whose bodies and temporal existence are governed through policy rather than punishment. Asylum regimes exemplify this logic with particular clarity. Refugees are subjected to medical screenings, spatial confinement, identification procedures, and prolonged processing, all of which function to render their lives administratively manageable while withholding political inclusion. Biopolitics thus reveals asylum not as a humanitarian exception but as a routine technology of governance, one that sustains life at the level of biological survival while suspending the conditions necessary for dignity, agency, and recognition.

Crucially, biopolitical power operates through time as much as space. Detention and asylum processing rely on waiting, delay, and procedural repetition as techniques of control, transforming temporality into a mechanism of governance. Refugees are compelled to inhabit extended periods of uncertainty in which futures are indefinitely postponed and pasts are rendered legally irrelevant. This temporal suspension produces a condition of permanent provisionality, where life continues without resolution, belonging, or narrative closure. Foucault's framework allows us to understand this condition not as an administrative malfunction but as a structural effect of governance: uncertainty is not a failure of the system but one of its operational strategies. Asylum regimes manage populations by keeping them in states of unresolved legality, ensuring compliance through dependency while avoiding the ethical and political costs of full recognition. Life is maintained, but it is maintained as administratively conditional, contingent on procedures that never fully conclude.

Yet while Foucault's analysis exposes how power operates over life, it deliberately refrains from grounding an ethical critique. Biopolitics describes mechanisms, rationalities, and effects, but it does not provide a normative account of responsibility when governance produces suffering. This methodological restraint, while analytically powerful, creates a conceptual limit when applied to asylum contexts. Refugees are not only governed; they are exposed to neglect, harm, and abandonment that exceed mere regulation. The biopolitical framework can explain how detention systems function, but it cannot fully articulate why such functioning constitutes an ethical failure rather than a neutral exercise of power. This gap is particularly visible in asylum regimes that present themselves as lawful and procedural while producing conditions of prolonged harm. The question that biopolitics

leaves unresolved is not how power operates, but how responsibility emerges when power sustains life while refusing care, recognition, or accountability.

It is precisely within this unresolved space that the deconstructive ethics of Geoffrey Bennington becomes indispensable. Bennington's work challenges the assumption that ethics can be stabilized within legal frameworks, moral rules, or institutional guarantees. For Bennington, responsibility does not arise from compliance with law or from adherence to codified norms; it emerges in situations where such structures fail to protect human life. Ethics, in this sense, is not an optional supplement to law but an unavoidable demand provoked by its inadequacy. When systems designed to secure justice instead produce vulnerability, responsibility does not disappear into procedural legitimacy; it intensifies, calling for response precisely because no formal mechanism can fully account for the harm being done. This conception of ethics refuses reassurance. It insists that responsibility is most acute where certainty collapses, where decisions cannot be justified by reference to rules, and where harm persists under the appearance of legality.

Applied to asylum, Bennington's framework reframes detention not simply as a legal anomaly or policy failure, but as an ethical crisis generated by structural indeterminacy. Refugees detained in prolonged legal limbo inhabit spaces where responsibility is systematically deferred: states cite procedure, jurisdiction, or security, while humanitarian discourse invokes care without accountability. In such contexts, responsibility is continuously displaced, never fully assumed. Bennington's ethics exposes this displacement as itself an ethical failure. The absence of recognition, the refusal to decide, and the reliance on administrative delay do not absolve responsibility; they produce it. Ethics emerges not despite the suspension of law, but because of it. This perspective allows asylum to be understood as a moral terrain shaped by the ongoing refusal of decision, where harm is sustained through procedural neutrality rather than overt violence.

The conjunction of Foucault and Bennington thus produces a productive tension rather than a seamless synthesis. Foucault reveals how asylum operates as a biopolitical apparatus that regulates life through administrative rationality, while Bennington insists that such regulation cannot neutralize ethical demand. Where biopolitics explains how refugees are governed, deconstructive ethics asks what it means to govern without assuming responsibility for the consequences of that governance. This dual framework resists the temptation to resolve asylum's contradictions by appealing either to better law or more humane administration. Instead, it insists that the ethical problem of asylum lies precisely in the gap between power and responsibility, a gap that cannot be closed by procedural reform alone. Asylum becomes, in this reading, a space where life is intensely managed and yet ethically abandoned, where control is exercised without corresponding accountability.

This framework also clarifies the role of narrative and testimony within asylum contexts. If responsibility arises where law fails, then acts of witnessing acquire ethical significance not because they restore legality, but because they expose its limits. Testimonial narratives do not resolve biopolitical power; they interrupt it, rendering visible the human consequences of administrative abstraction. Within Bennington's ethical horizon, such narratives function as responses to structural failure rather than appeals to institutional recognition. They do not seek validation from the law that has already failed them; instead, they confront readers with the demand that emerges from that failure. This understanding of ethics is crucial for analyzing literary accounts of detention, which do not simply document suffering but enact responsibility by forcing attention to what governance leaves unaddressed.

By holding Foucault's biopolitics and Bennington's deconstructive ethics in tension, this paper develops a framework capable of analyzing asylum as both a mechanism of control and a site of ethical provocation. Biopolitics explains the administrative rationality that governs refugee life, while deconstructive ethics reveals why that rationality cannot exhaust the moral stakes of asylum. Together, these perspectives allow for an analysis that neither reduces detention to policy failure nor dissolves responsibility into abstract moralism. Instead, they expose asylum as a structurally unethical space, one in which life is governed without resolution and responsibility emerges precisely because governance refuses to decide. This framework will guide the analysis of Manus Island as a biopolitical site in the next section, where administrative power produces the very conditions that demand ethical response.

The offshore detention regime established on Manus Island constitutes one of the clearest contemporary examples of asylum functioning as a biopolitical apparatus rather than a mechanism of protection. Designed as part of Australia's broader strategy of deterrence, the Manus Island facility operated through the systematic regulation of bodies, movement, and time, transforming asylum seekers into administratively managed populations rather than rights-bearing subjects. Detention on the island was characterized by spatial confinement, constant surveillance, and procedural opacity, producing a condition in which refugees were physically contained while legally unresolved. Individuals were registered, categorized, medically assessed, and monitored, yet their legal status remained indefinitely suspended. This combination of intense administrative attention and juridical indeterminacy reveals how asylum governance preserves life in its most minimal form while withholding political resolution, situating refugees within a regime of management rather than adjudication.

A defining feature of the Manus Island system was the centrality of waiting as a governing technique. Refugees were subjected to prolonged periods of inactivity punctuated by administrative procedures that rarely produced outcomes. Interviews, assessments, and reviews occurred without clear timelines or transparent criteria, transforming bureaucratic process into a mechanism of control. Time itself became an instrument of governance, structured not toward resolution but toward endurance. This temporal suspension deprived refugees of narrative continuity, as past experiences were reduced to case files and future possibilities were indefinitely deferred. Life continued biologically, but it was stripped of trajectory, producing a form of existence organized around repetition rather than progression. Such temporal management exemplifies biopolitical power's reliance on delay and uncertainty, demonstrating that unresolved legality is not a flaw in the system but one of its operational conditions.

Spatial organization on Manus Island further reinforced this regime of control. Refugees were confined within heavily regulated environments that limited movement, interaction, and autonomy. Living spaces were overcrowded, monitored, and subject to constant regulation, while access to external spaces was tightly controlled or entirely prohibited. The architecture of detention functioned not merely as containment but as a means of producing compliance, shaping daily routines and bodily conduct through restriction. Movement was transformed into a privilege contingent on administrative approval, reinforcing dependency on institutional authority. These spatial constraints operated alongside surveillance practices that rendered refugee bodies continuously visible to administrative oversight, producing subjects who were perpetually observed yet politically invisible. The management of space thus intersected with the management of time, creating a totalizing environment in which life was regulated at the level of daily existence.

Medical and psychological governance constituted another critical dimension of biopolitical control on Manus Island. Health assessments, treatment protocols, and access to care were embedded within administrative frameworks that prioritized containment over wellbeing. Refugees' bodies were monitored for fitness and compliance rather than cared for as sites of vulnerability. Medical attention was frequently delayed, denied, or conditioned on procedural approval, transforming healthcare into an extension of bureaucratic management. Psychological distress, depression, and trauma were documented but rarely addressed in ways that altered the structural conditions producing them. This medicalization of detention illustrates how biopolitics operates through the preservation of biological life without attending to the conditions necessary for mental or social survival. Health became a matter of administrative record rather than substantive care, reinforcing the reduction of refugee life to biological endurance.

Legal ambiguity was not incidental to the Manus Island regime but constitutive of its function. Refugees were neither granted asylum nor deported, existing instead within a prolonged state of juridical suspension. Jurisdictional complexity—arising from the involvement of multiple states and authorities—further obscured accountability, allowing responsibility to be deferred across institutional boundaries. Legal processes were fragmented, opaque, and often inaccessible, ensuring that refugees remained dependent on administrative discretion without meaningful avenues for challenge or appeal. This condition of suspended legality exemplifies how biopolitical governance operates through inclusion without recognition, holding individuals within legal systems without granting them the protections those systems are presumed to offer.

The cumulative effect of these practices was the production of structural vulnerability as a governing condition rather than an unintended consequence. Refugees on Manus Island were subjected to intense administrative regulation while remaining excluded from political resolution, creating a population that was simultaneously managed and abandoned. Their lives were sustained at the level of survival but stripped of stability, agency, and future orientation. Biopolitical power functioned here not through overt violence but through procedural normality, rendering prolonged harm administratively acceptable. The detention system did not collapse into chaos; it operated with bureaucratic consistency, demonstrating that the endurance of suffering was compatible with institutional order.

Manus Island thus exemplifies asylum as a biopolitical site where governance prioritizes control over resolution and management over protection. The regime's reliance on delay, spatial confinement, surveillance, and legal indeterminacy reveals how asylum systems can operate effectively while producing profound precarity. Refugee life within this framework is not extinguished but indefinitely managed, sustained without conclusion and regulated without recognition. This structural analysis provides the necessary context for understanding the significance of narrative testimony produced from within such environments. It is against this backdrop of administrative control and legal suspension that the intervention of literary witnessing must be understood, a task taken up in the following section through a close analysis of Behrouz Boochani's memoir.

*No Friend But the Mountains*, written by Behrouz Boochani during his detention on Manus Island, constitutes a form of narrative that cannot be adequately understood as memoir in the conventional sense. Rather than offering a retrospective account shaped by temporal distance and narrative closure, the text is produced from within the very conditions it documents: confinement, surveillance, uncertainty, and prolonged legal suspension. This immanence fundamentally shapes its form. The narrative unfolds without the assurance of resolution, mirroring the indefinite temporality of detention itself. Episodes are fragmented, recursive, and often unresolved, resisting linear progression in favor of repetition and accumulation. This structural instability is not a stylistic deficiency but a formal enactment of life under administrative suspension. The text refuses the consolations of narrative coherence because such coherence would misrepresent the lived reality of detention, where time does not move toward outcome but circulates around waiting, endurance, and repetition.

One of the most striking features of Boochani's narrative is its persistent attention to silence, interruption, and absence. Much of what occurs within the detention regime cannot be fully articulated: acts of violence go unrecorded, bureaucratic decisions are rendered opaque, and moments of psychological collapse resist narration altogether. These silences are not gaps to be filled by interpretation; they function as formal markers of structural failure. The text repeatedly gestures toward what cannot be said, what cannot be safely recorded, and what remains inaccessible even to the narrator himself. In doing so, it exposes the limits of documentation under conditions of surveillance and control. Silence becomes a narrative strategy that signals the insufficiency of language in the face of administrative power, refusing to translate suffering into legible evidence for institutional consumption. This refusal is central to the text's force: it confronts the reader not with exhaustive testimony but with the presence of what remains unaccounted for.

The memoir's narrative voice further destabilizes conventional expectations of witness literature. Boochani frequently shifts between first-person experience, collective observation, and lyrical abstraction, refusing to anchor the text in a singular, stable subjectivity. This movement disrupts the liberal assumption that testimony derives its authority from individual authenticity alone. Instead, the narrative situates personal experience within a collective condition, emphasizing that detention produces shared vulnerability rather than isolated suffering. Characters appear, disappear, and reappear without narrative closure, mirroring the

precariousness of relationships formed within detention spaces. This instability resists the production of exemplary victims or redemptive figures, foregrounding instead the persistence of structural harm. The text thus refuses the narrative economy of humanitarian representation, which often demands clear victims, identifiable perpetrators, and emotionally consumable suffering.

Crucially, the act of writing itself functions as a form of resistance embedded within administrative constraint. Boochani composed the text through digital communication under conditions of surveillance, limited access, and constant risk, transforming restricted technological channels into sites of narrative production. Writing here is not an expression of freedom but an act performed within confinement, shaped by the same structures it seeks to expose. This condition renders the memoir inseparable from the biopolitical apparatus it documents. The text does not stand outside detention in order to critique it; it emerges from within, bearing the marks of restriction, fragmentation, and delay. In this sense, the memoir does not simply describe structural failure—it formally incorporates it, allowing the conditions of governance to imprint themselves on narrative structure.

The ethical force of *No Friend But the Mountains* arises not from moral appeal or juridical argument but from this sustained exposure of failure without resolution. The narrative does not ask for sympathy, nor does it frame itself as an appeal to law or humanitarian reform. Instead, it confronts the reader with the persistence of harm under procedural normality, refusing closure or consolation. The absence of narrative resolution mirrors the absence of legal resolution, producing a reading experience marked by discomfort, endurance, and unresolved tension. This formal strategy aligns with the deconstructive understanding of responsibility as something that emerges precisely where systems fail to respond. The text does not instruct the reader how to respond; it renders non-response untenable by sustaining attention on what governance refuses to resolve.

Address is another crucial dimension of the memoir's ethical operation. Boochani writes without presuming a specific audience capable of intervention, addressing readers who are implicated by distance rather than proximity. This address does not seek validation from institutions but confronts readers with their position outside the detention regime, exposing the asymmetry between observation and experience. The reader is not invited into a position of moral superiority or redemptive action; instead, the text implicates them in a structure that allows suffering to persist without accountability. Responsibility, in this sense, is not framed as an outcome but as a condition imposed by witnessing. The narrative demands sustained attention rather than immediate resolution, forcing the reader to inhabit, however briefly, the temporal suspension that defines detention.

Through its formal strategies—fragmentation, silence, unstable subjectivity, and unresolved address—*No Friend But the Mountains* enacts what can be understood as ethical witnessing under conditions of structural abandonment. The memoir does not restore meaning to suffering, nor does it translate experience into policy critique. Instead, it exposes the limits of such translations, insisting on the irreducibility of lived precarity within administrative systems. By refusing narrative closure, the text preserves the ethical demand generated by unresolved harm, demonstrating how literature can function as a site where responsibility is neither codified nor discharged, but continuously provoked.

Situated against the biopolitical structures of Manus Island, Boochani's memoir reveals the capacity of narrative to interrupt administrative abstraction without claiming authority over it. The text does not resolve the contradictions of asylum; it intensifies them, rendering visible the human consequences of governance that manages life without securing recognition. In doing so, *No Friend But the Mountains* exemplifies how literary testimony can operate within zones of systemic failure, not as a supplement to law but as a confrontation with its limits. This analysis sets the stage for the concluding section, which considers the broader implications of asylum as a space where biopolitical power and ethical responsibility intersect without reconciliation.

This paper has argued that asylum, as instantiated in the offshore detention regime on Manus Island, cannot be adequately understood as a failed legal system or a malfunctioning humanitarian apparatus. Rather, asylum must be approached as a structurally produced space in which biopolitical governance and ethical responsibility coexist in unresolved tension. The administrative management of refugee life—through detention, delay, surveillance, and juridical suspension—does not merely fall short of ethical ideals; it actively generates conditions in which responsibility is displaced, deferred, and obscured. Law functions here not as a guarantor of protection but as a mechanism that sustains indeterminacy, allowing power to operate without resolution while maintaining the appearance of procedural legitimacy. Asylum thus emerges not as an exception to modern governance but as one of its most revealing formations, exposing how life can be intensively regulated without being meaningfully recognized.

By bringing together biopolitical analysis and deconstructive ethics, this study has sought to resist two dominant tendencies in asylum scholarship: the reduction of detention to policy failure and the moralization of refugee suffering through humanitarian appeal. A biopolitical framework reveals how asylum operates through administrative rationality, transforming uncertainty, waiting, and spatial confinement into techniques of governance. Yet this framework alone risks naturalizing harm by treating it as an effect of power rather than a provocation of responsibility. Deconstructive ethics intervenes at precisely this limit, insisting that responsibility does not dissolve in the presence of law, procedure, or institutional complexity. On the contrary, responsibility intensifies where such structures fail to account for the lives they govern. The ethical problem of asylum, from this perspective, is not that law is absent, but that it remains operational while refusing decision, recognition, and accountability.

The analysis of detention on Manus Island has demonstrated how biopolitical governance sustains refugee life in a state of permanent provisionality, preserving biological survival while eroding political agency and future orientation. Refugees are neither excluded nor included; they are held in suspension, managed without resolution. This condition is not an unintended consequence of administrative inefficiency but a structural feature of deterrence-based asylum regimes. The endurance of harm within procedural normality reveals a form of governance that is compatible with suffering, provided that suffering remains administratively legible and legally unresolved. In such a context, appeals to reform, efficiency, or improved humanitarian management risk leaving intact the very structures that produce vulnerability, mistaking ethical failure for technical deficiency.

It is against this background that the intervention of *No Friend But the Mountains* must be understood. Boochani's memoir does not function as evidence to be absorbed into legal or humanitarian discourse; it operates as a sustained confrontation with the limits of such discourse. By refusing narrative closure, moral reassurance, or juridical appeal, the text preserves the unresolved character of detention, forcing the reader to remain with what governance refuses to settle. Ethical responsibility here is not discharged through recognition or sympathy; it is imposed through endurance, through the sustained exposure to harm that cannot be justified, resolved, or explained away. The memoir does not restore faith in law or administration; it renders their failure inescapable.

The implications of this analysis extend beyond Manus Island and beyond refugee literature. Asylum emerges as a paradigmatic site for examining how modern governance manages life without assuming responsibility for the conditions it produces. The ethical demand provoked by such governance cannot be satisfied through better procedures alone, because it arises from the very structure of procedural deferral. Literature, in this context, does not offer solutions; it performs an interruption, exposing the moral cost of administrative abstraction. Refugee narratives thus occupy a critical position within contemporary ethical and political thought, not because they humanize policy debates, but because they reveal the insufficiency of policy as a response to structurally produced harm.

Ultimately, this paper has sought to reframe asylum as a moral and ethical terrain rather than a purely legal or humanitarian one. Responsibility, as this study has shown, does not originate in law, rights frameworks, or institutional mandates; it emerges where these structures fail to respond to the lives they govern. Asylum regimes like Manus Island make this failure visible by sustaining life while withholding recognition, producing zones where ethical obligation cannot be codified or discharged. In attending to these zones through biopolitical analysis and literary witnessing, this paper argues for an understanding of responsibility that is neither resolved nor reassured by law, but persistently provoked by its collapse. In this sense, asylum is not simply a problem to be fixed; it is a condition that exposes the ethical limits of contemporary governance itself.

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