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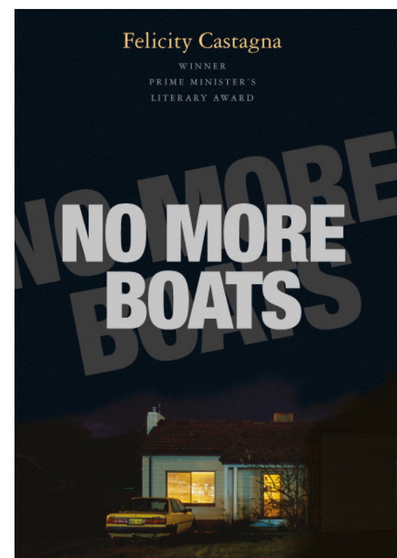
FELICITY CASTAGNA

Felicity Castagna
No More Boats
Giramondo Publishing
Fiction, Paperback, 232pp, $26.95
Published June 2017
ISBN 9781925336306

It is 2001. 438 refugees sit in a boat called Tampa off the shoreline of Australia, while the TV and radio scream out that the country is being flooded, inundated, overrun by migrants. Antonio Martone, once a migrant himself, has been forced to retire, his wife has moved in with the woman next door, his daughter runs off with strange men, his deadbeat son is hiding in the garden smoking marijuana. Amid his growing paranoia, the ghost of his dead friend shows up and commands him to paint 'No More Boats' in giant letters across his front yard. The Prime Minister of Australia keeps telling Antonio that 'we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come'. Antonio's not sure he wants to think about all the things that led him to get on a boat and come to Australia in the first place. A man and a nation unravel together.



About the author

Felicity Castagna won the 2014 Prime Miniter's Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction for her previous novel, *The Incredible Here and Now*, which was shortlisted for the Children's Book Council of Australia and NSW Premier's Literary Awards, and adapted for the stage by the National Theatre of Parramatta. Her collection of short stories, *Small Indiscretions*, was named an *Australian Book Review* Book of the Year. Castagna's work has appeared on radio and television and she runs the storytelling series Studio Stories.

It is exciting to read a work of fiction that makes an explicit connection between its characters' personal narratives and the specific events of political history; something of a tradition in American fiction, but rarer in an Australian context.
Delia Falconer

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A note from the author

I live in the place where the boats can go no further – at the mouth of the Parramatta River where salt water meets fresh, where early explorers who sailed from Sydney Cove in the late 1700s looking for a route into the interior of NSW stopped and built jails and asylums and orphanages and locked people up on the river's edge, and where the Aboriginal warrior Pemulwuy and his men with spears chased all those invaders and their boats back out into the mangroves towards the sea. It is also the place where post-WWII migrants came on boats, and settled to work in the factories around Silverwater and Clyde. It is now a place that is populated by our newest boat arrivals, who are sometimes locked up in nearby Villawood for weeks or months or years.

But *No More Boats* is not just about Parramatta. Our collective cultural anxiety about the boat drives our politics. We live in a world where the international refugee crisis dominates the nightly news. I could have set this novel in a number of historical periods and explored the same issues, but I chose the Tampa Crisis as its backdrop, because it was a seminal event: it cemented our off-shore detention policies, and it has made the issue of boat arrivals central to every election since then.

No More Boats is a book that has been in my head since the early 2000s when I returned to Australia. I left with my family when I was eight, to live in the USA, Canada, Mexico and Indonesia. The political and personal landscape I returned to perplexed and fascinated me as both an insider and outsider to Australian culture. My father's family were Greeks exiled from Egypt who migrated to Ethiopia where they intermarried with the Italian community before fleeing across Africa and arriving in Australia in the 1950s to become one of few migrant families in the bigoted rural outskirts of Newcastle. That's where my father met my mother, whose family in many ways exemplifies Pauline Hanson's 'Aussie Battlers', working-class disenfranchised people of Anglo-Scottish descent who had never met migrants before my mother married one. I listened to both sides of my family debate Hansonism and the Tampa Crisis. My father's family recognised that the prejudice that migrants face was very similar to their own story, but at other times they insisted that they had fought harder to fit in as 'New Australians', denied the benefits of welfare and 'hyphenated identities.' For my mother's family there were memories of how hard my father's family had struggled, but also an insistence that they ended up being 'good migrants' because they had put up without complaining or expecting anything more. Besides, my father had single-handedly wrenched his family into the middle-class – why weren't this new generation of migrants willing to work as hard?

I don't think any of these contradictory positions are unique to my family. Two-thirds of Australians were either born overseas, married to a migrant or the child of at least one migrant parent. Sometimes I have to wonder if our increasing anxiety about migrants is just as much a battle with ourselves as it is a battle with the 'other.'

Felicity Castagna