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Looking for Paradise



Looking for Paradise – Book 5

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Looking for Paradise
Book 5

by Nathalie Hartog-Gautier

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Book 5 of 12 books

100 pages hand made raw cotton paper.

58 cm x 41 cm

Ink drawings, gouache, collages, digital prints.

Typewriter text and relief print with gilding tools.

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About Looking for Paradise

Australia is a population of immigrants and refugees with its own history of displacement of its first inhabitants marginalised and relegated to missions.

The work creates a parallel between Australian government policies and their consequences on refugees' quest in looking for a better place to live, a search for paradise and their dreams to find a refuge.

Central to the theme of the work, I am bringing the stories of these immigrants who are relegated to the margin of society, to the centre page.

At the heart of the work is a series of 12 books that look into how past and present policies instigated to help or denied entry to people in need of a 'safe heaven'. The books are presented in a barb wire cage. Each gallery chooses a number of books to display, alluding to the restrictive movements imposed on refugees.

The texts are framed with drawings of the Australian bush and botanical specimens referencing the displacement of the indigenous population from their lands and placed in camps or mission.

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About Nathalie Hartog-Gautier

As an Australian migrant, my life over the past 40 years has been a journey integrating my past, present and future through my art. My work focuses on the voyages of people and the interaction between their new environments and the ecology they bring with them.

This allows me to explore the transformation, attachments, associations and in particular, the intersection between place, memory, and identity underpinned by my own association and relationship with the landscapes of France where I was born and Australia where I live.

Weaving past and present is like seeing your own reflection and reading through it the landscape I have experienced.

Australia is a rich multicultural society and my work responds to this condition. My experiences of journey, of resettlement and of viewing the land with fresh eyes, informs my response to the current political environment.

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ARTICLE 5

NO REFUGEE OR ASYLUM SEEKER SHALL BE FORCED TO RETURN TO A COUNTRY WHERE HE OR SHE MIGHT FACE PERSECUTION OR TORTURE.

THE PRINCIPLE OF NON-REFOULEMENT IS THE CORNERSTONE OF REFUGEE PROTECTION

AND IS SET OUT IN ARTICLE 33 OF THE 1951 CONVENTION.



Declaration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

ARTICLE 5

No refugee or asylum seeker shall be forced to return to a country where her or she might face persecution or torture.

The principle of non-refoulement is the cornerstone of refugee protection and is set out in article 33 of the refugee convention.

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WE WERE LIVING IN LAOS UNTIL 1976 AND BECAUSE OF THE WAR WE LEFT. WE WERE TRYING TO FIND A WAY OUT. SOME PEOPLE SAID THAT WAY WAS GOOD, SOME SAID ANOTHER WAY. WE JUST WANTED TO GET OUT. WE WENT TO A CAMP IN THAILAND. WE LIVED THERE FOR ABOUT A YEAR. THERE WERE ONLY LAOTIAN AND CAMBODIAN IN THAT CAMP. IT WAS A VERY BIG CAMP. IT WAS DIFFICULT WITH THE CHILDREN. THERE WAS VERY LITTLE FOOD AND WATER. I WAS WORRYING FOR THE KIDS BECAUSE THERE WAS NO SCHOOL EITHER, NOTHING. THAT'S WHY WE TRIED TO GET OUT. WE DID IT A TRIP WITH THE 4 CHILDREN. FISHING BOATS TOOK US TO THE "HOSPITAL". WE WERE NOT SCARED OF PIRATES. WE HAD ONLY OUR PERSONAL DOCUMENTS, OUR ONLY SUPPLY OF WATER WAS FROM THE RAIN. WE HAD 4 CHILDREN: BOON, THE ELDEST SON WAS 7 YEARS OLD AT THE TIME. VATH, WHO WAS ALSO 7 YEARS OLD AND CHOUA THE YOUNGEST WHO WAS 5 YEARS OLD. DENG OUR DAUGHTER WAS 5 YEARS OLD. WE WENT TO BANHONG AND THEN TO THE SEA. WE KNEW THERE WAS A BOAT WAITING FOR US. THERE WERE OVER 200 PEOPLE WAITING TO GET ON THE LEOPARD. WE ALL CAME FROM DIFFERENT PLACES. WE WOULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING TO GET ON THAT BOAT. THE FAMILY WAS FEARFUL. WE WERE HUNGRY AND WORKING. SOMEONE ON THE BOAT TOOK THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE FAMILIES TO SEND TO OUR RELATIVES BACK HOME IN LAOS TO SHOW THEM WE WERE ALRIGHT.

STAYED ON THE LEOPARD FOR 6 MONTHS IN THE SINGAPORE WATER. THE BOAT WAS TAKING WATER AND WE WERE WAITING TO BE RESCUED. FOR 5 MONTHS WE HAD NO WATER, NOTHING. WE HAD TO WAIT FOR THE RAIN TO COME AND SOMETIMES FISHING BOATS WOULD GIVE US FISH TO EAT AND WATER. THE BUREAUCRATS IN SINGAPORE ORGANIZED SOME MONEY TO HELP US. THEY BROUGHT US WATER AND FOOD (RICE) AND PROVIDED A COVER FOR THE BOAT TO GIVE US SOME SHADE. THE THAI AND PEOPLE HELPED US TOO. WE ASKED THE FISHING BOATS TO HELP US. TO TAKE OUR LETTERS TO SEND TO BANHONG TO THE FAMILY TO TELL THEM WHERE WE WERE. CHARITIES WOULD BRING US SOME FOOD WE WERE STORING ON THE DECK OF THE BOAT. WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO US. THE BOAT WAS SINKING. WE JUST WANTED TO LEAVE THE BOAT. THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT DIDN'T LIKE US TO COME TOO CLOSE TO THE LAND. THEY WERE SCARED OF US JUMPING OVERBOARD AND SWIMMING TO SHORE. EVERY DAY THE TUGBOATS WOULD COME AND PULL US OUT TO THE DEEP SEA. IT WAS HARD ON THE CHILDREN. THEY WERE CRYING, THEY WERE HUNGRY. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. DAY AFTER DAY, JUST WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO COME AND HELP US. WE WERE LIKE TIGERS SLEEPING ON THAT BOAT. IT WAS HARD TOO WHEN IT CAME TO RAINING. SOMEONE CAME ON BOARD FROM THE US IN SINGAPORE TO ASSESS THE SITUATION OF EACH FAMILY, HAD TO SHOW KIDNEY CHILDREN.



Testimony from Khamsy Thongsouk

We were living in Laos until 1976 and because of the war we left. We were trying to find a way out. Some people said that way was good, some said another way. We just wanted to get out. We went to a camp in Thailand. We lived there for about a year. There we were only Laotian and Cambodian in that camp. It was a very big camp. It was difficult with the children: there was very little food and water. I was worrying for the kids because there was no school either, nothing. That's why we tried to get out. We hid in a truck with the 4 children.

Fishing boats took us to the Leapdal. We were so scared of pirates. We had only our personal documents. Our only source of water was from the rain.

We have 4 children: Soun, the eldest son was 7 years old at the time, Vath, who was also 7 years old and Choua the youngest who was 3 years old, and Deng our daughter who was 5 years old.

We went to Bangkok and then to the sea. We knew there was a boat waiting for us. There were over 200 people waiting to get on the Leapdal, we all came from different places.

We would have done anything to get onto that boat, the family came first. We were hungry and worried.

Someone on the boat took the photographs of the families to send to our relative back in Laos to show them we were all right.

We were on the Leapdal for 6 months in the Singapore water. The boat was taking water and we were waiting to be rescued. For 3 months we had no water, nothing. We had to wait for the rain to come and some time fishing boat would give us fish to eat and water.

The Buddhists in Singapore organised some money to help us, they brought us water and food (rice) and provided a cover for the boat to give us some shade. The Thailand people helped us too.

We asked the fishing boat to help us, to take our letters to send to Bangkok to the family to tell them where we were.

Charities would bring us some food we were storing on the deck of the boat.

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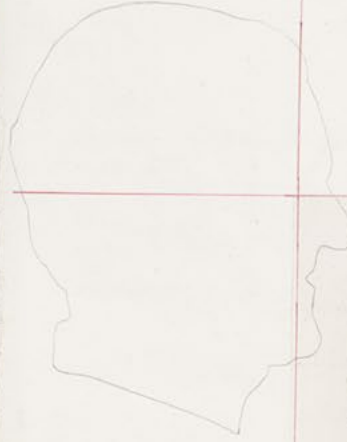
Testimony from Khamsy Thongsouk (continued)

We didn't know what was going to happen to us. The boat was sinking. We just wanted to leave the boat. The Singapore government didn't like us to come too close to the land. They were scared of us jumping overboard and swimming to shore. Every day a towboats would come and pull us out to the deep sea.

It was hard on the children. They cried, they were hungry. I didn't know what to do. Day after day, just waiting for someone to come and help us. We were like tin fish sleeping on that boat. It was hard too when it kept on raining.

Someone came on board from the UN in Singapore to record the situation of each family: names, how many children, ...

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IF WE HAD RELATIVES OVERSEAS, SOMEONE WOULD COME ON THE BOAT AND READ A LIST OF NAMES
 OF THE FAMILIES ADMITTED TO GO TO AUSTRALIA.

IT WAS NOT DURING THE DAY, WE HAD STORIES AS WELL. SOMETIMES BIG BOATS WOULD COME VERY
 CLOSE DURING THE NIGHT BECAUSE WE DIDN'T HAVE LIGHTS, THEY COULDN'T SEE US AND THEY
 WOULD COME SO CLOSE THAT A FEW TIMES WE THOUGHT WE WOULD DIE. THE CREW FROM THOSE SHIPS
 WOULD GET ANGRY WITH US: "WHAT DON'T YOU PUT SOME LIGHTS ON?"

ONE DAY IT WAS OUR TURN, THE AUSTRALIAN IMMIGRATION CAME ON BOARD TO TELL US WE HAD
 FAMILY IN AUSTRALIA AND THEY WERE WAITING FOR US.

FIRST TIME ON THE LINE! WE WERE TAKEN TO A HOTEL TO HAVE A BATH, THEN WE WERE
 AND GIVEN NEW CLOTHES TO WEAR.

OUR 4 CHILDREN WENT TO UNIVERSITY.

STORY AND IMAGES COURTESY KIMMY THOMAS



Testimony from Khamsy Thongsouk (continued)

... if we had relatives overseas.

Someone would come on the boat and read a list of names of the families accepted to go to another county.

It was very hot during the day. We had storm as well. Sometime big boats would come very close. During the night, because we didn't have lights, they couldn't see us and they would come so close that a few times we thought we would die. The crew from those ships would get angry with us: "What don't you put some lights on!"

One day it was our turn. The Australian emigration came on board to tell us we had family in Australia and they were taking us.

First time on the land we were taken to a hotel to have a shower, fresh water! and we were given new clothes to travel.

Our 4 children went to university and are working now.

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An interactive version* of this book with further information and resources can be downloaded from www.nathaliehartog.com.au

* requires Acrobat Reader on a laptop or desktop computer