

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July:

*People without Borders*

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(Chair: Morag Fraser)

Imagine the biblical Ruth arriving by boat on an island that may or may not be part of Australia for immigration purposes: 'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people will be my people, and thy God my God.'

The relevant official (let's call him Canute) would presumably note this as clearly inadequate as a formal request for asylum, then pack Ruth off to Nauru for processing and possible return to wherever it is she came from. There is almost something bleakly funny about this. The officious response is ethically repugnant, but also a ridiculous attempt to repress the underlying reality that people are on the move. Global capital is on the move, and people are following it. Borders and the second-class citizenship of being a guest worker can contain the pressures for a while, but the pressures mount, and will express themselves in dangerous ways.

Let us assume for a moment that the extreme options – a policed wall at the border to keep people out, or a system of apartheid to regulate differential rights within – are unpalatable and impractical. Some fundamental questions about international migration remain:

- What do we do at present (in Australia and elsewhere) to regulate the movement of people?
- What **should** we do about it?
- Does 'due process' ever become abusive of human rights? And what could be done pragmatically to ameliorate the abuse?
- What sort of legitimate limitations are there on a human right to migrate in search of a better life?
- How important is the difference between those seeking political asylum and 'economic migrants'?
- Is terrorism a good reason for policing borders? If so, what sorts of regulation are a good idea?
- Is the migration of people a historical phenomenon that is unstoppable on the rise? Or are there good ways of discouraging people movements and the dislocation they bring?
- How long will it be before population decline in Western countries forces us to open the borders and wonder what all the fuss was about?