



# The EU and the Utopia and Anti-utopia of Migration: A Response to Harald Bauder<sup>1</sup>

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*We consider that to us communists the question of boundaries is not of major importance and that there can be no conflicts about it between socialist countries .... With the victory of Communism ... state boundaries will die off.*

(Nikita Khrushchev in Leipzig, East Germany, 7.3.59,  
quoted in Kristof, 1959, 271, footnote 17)

Harald Bauder takes an initiative to look differently at the possibilities of migration and open borders. He wants to suggest that “it is possible, perhaps even necessary, for geographers to rethink the current system of regulating the international movement of people” (Bauder, this issue). Harald asks how one could imagine a world without immigration controls and ends his piece with a note on utopian visions, including David Harvey’s outlook concluding “Spaces of Hope” (Harvey, 2000). It is the connection of the critique of borders with a utopian vision that I would like to focus on here, and Harvey’s vision is interesting in this respect. In his future history, he looks at gender relations, sexuality, the environment, living and housing, producing and consuming. In only a few paragraphs, the movement of people enters the picture. People can move freely and are encouraged to spend some time away from their place of birth. Harvey also imagines a mechanism to prevent a brain drain from regions. In my opinion, there is a central question about the role of migration in Harvey’s utopia. The passages that deal with migration are very brief. Migration, so it seems, is not a real issue in the utopia of

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“Spaces of Hope”. Why does Harald use Harvey’s vision, even if it does not have migration as its main focus?

My response to Harald’s article is based on this question. Harald delivers a forceful critique of the present constellation in border politics. Migration politics are also one of the main debates characterising “alternative” or “critical” movements. But utopian visions seem not to be about border politics. If borders have no relevance in utopian visions, could it be that these debates are not at all about migration? Drawing on Harald’s elaboration, I would like to further investigate the role of borders and migration in utopian visions, and then ask about their role in the contemporary European Union (EU). Harald’s critique is strongly focussed on the state-politics and economics of migration. He points out how migration and border controls are a central element in capitalist exploitation structures. While this will emerge as one important argument, the second important argument is that the movement of people carries a potential, and forms a critical practice.

## Utopia and Migration

Positive utopias picture different worlds. In looking through utopian visions, one can see that most of them do not imagine migration. For example, Thomas More’s 16th-century – which envisions a society of slave-holders and “wise rule” – dedicates one page to the travelling of the utopians (More, 2002). People are severely punished or enslaved if they travel without permission. H. G. Wells’ “The shape of things to come” (1933/2001) describes detailed structures of governance and communication, but does not consider migration. These utopias, however, are far from the utopias that David Harvey seems to draw on. Perhaps more interesting are contemporary novels, like Aldous Huxley’s “Island” (1962/1994). He imagines different spiritual, productive and sexual politics on an island in the Pacific. He does not – or, if so, only fleetingly – discuss the movement of people.<sup>2</sup> The two novels I would like to discuss further are probably the most influential utopian novels of the 1970s (cp. Moylan, 1986, and Kitchin/Kneale, 2001 for 1980s and 1990s science-fiction): Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974/1996) and Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1979).

*The Dispossessed* is set in a world of collective work and life, on a near-empty moon. Anarres is the product of an initial migration – anarchists (“Odonians”) emigrated from the main planet Urras to the barren moon. On Anarres people do travel – they travel to do seasonal work, or they travel to go to another community. There are no borders on Anarres, it works along principles of solidarity exchange and a decentralised structure. Connection is however the most important issue in the regional planning of the moon – “They build roads before they build houses”, LeGuin writes. Beyond the free movement of people on Anarres, migration is not problematized. The story revolves around a border-crossing, however, of the journey of a young scientist to the capitalist central planet. Such journeys are very rare, and in the course of this border-crossing, the conflict lines of the

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<sup>2</sup> H. G. Wells describes superhighways, and the emergence of his super-state was based on the transport-monopoly of the “Air-Dictatorship”. His vision is thus about the flow of goods and of knowledge, not so much of people. Huxley’s *Island* is narrated from the perspective of a visitor to the island and draws on the relation of the utopian island with the neighbouring islands, part of a totalitarian system. In the end, the island is occupied by the army of the stronger neighbour.

story emerge. The scientist wants to develop his theory and is in contact with scientists on Urras. For his desire of exchange with the “profiteers,” and for the illegitimate border-crossing this entails, he is abused and attacked. The journey shows the results of the initial separation – that the stability of the Anarresti society was achieved through the cutting-off of connections with the planet. Urrasti “profiteers” are not allowed on Anarres.

Marge Piercy in *Woman on the Edge of Time* also describes a society that consists of local communities in communication and exchange with each other. This world is the result of a revolution, in which the capitalists and their supporters – machine-people – have been driven into space. Again, this world is thus the result of an initial separation. Its local communities are self-sufficient and organised into regional councils and higher-scale organisations, similar to David Harvey’s model of the future society. Piercy also describes alternative arrangements of reproduction, work and sexuality. Migration is only mentioned briefly when the need to prevent brain-drain is discussed. Apart from that, there are no borders. The main thread of the story consists of the struggle of a woman living in 1960s/70s New York with psychiatric institutions. In spite of being locked up, heavily medicated, and later also subjected to brain surgery, she is in psychic contact with a woman in the utopian world. Through this contact, she manages to escape from the institution (but is caught again), and experiences short episodes of life in the future world in which she is free to transgress the boundaries that are set for her in 1970s New York. The contrasts between “our” world and the future utopia are played out directly. Again, the border crossing or the encounter of two worlds becomes the productive element of the story.

The visions of these utopias show two important points. First, utopian novels (at least the ones that I discussed) do not pay much attention to migration. It does not seem to be a problem. The interaction between humans and the environment, the conditions of production and consumption, social relations, emotional and sexual relationships – these are the issues discussed in these utopias. Where these conditions are right, the movement of people is simply not a phenomenon that requires much discussion. Judging from this, it seems that migration politics are not a way to utopia. The second point is a question emerging from this. Migration does not seem to be conceived of as a utopian question. However, migration politics is one of the main debates characterising “alternative” movements. Harald Bauder shows one reason for the role of migration in the analysis of the contemporary world. Borders, border-crossing and the movement of people are critical because they show the deficiencies of today’s world most clearly. Also, although the visions I discussed do not explicitly discuss migration politics, they demonstrate an implicit politics of border-crossing. They show that from the movement of people, from the meeting of differences, critical potential emerges. In the crossing of a border, there is the potential to keep structures from freezing.

### **The Contemporary Anti-utopia**

The contemporary world, as Harald has pointed out, is far from a utopian society. We obviously do not live in self-reliant and environmentally reasonable local communities. Neither do we live in a fairy-tale world of perfect Western market-pluralism. That there is extreme discrimination and injustice on local and on global scales is evident. Finally, we do not live in a world where people move only for their own

pleasure. Rather, the pressure for flexibility and mobility on workers is increasing more and more – some are put in first class seats, others are forced to swim through rivers. The relation of utopia and anti-utopia, however, can be used as a tool for the analysis of the contemporary world and – in my context – of the European Union (EU). The EU has established a discourse of borderlessness inside the Union. Utopia seems close. The instances of anti-utopia in the EU however outnumber this utopia by far.

For almost 50 years, in the “West” the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Treaty states served as an anti-Utopia in every sense, including migration. The Berlin Wall became a monument for the connection of freedom and free movement. People in the “Eastern Bloc” were not allowed to move freely. The walls and fences around Berlin were quoted as silent witnesses of the failure of the communist states. On the other side of the picture, the free-wheeling Western European states started establishing the EEC/EC/EU. Borderlessness, or “free” movement, meant freedom. This discourse, however, was accompanied by racism and the limitation of free movement in Western Europe, too. The economic discrimination and exploitation of foreign workers – for example people from the Maghreb in France, from Turkey in Germany, from all parts of the former Empire in the UK – in the post-war years up until the 1980s was linked with travel restrictions and limited freedom of residence. In the 1990s, the perfection of the “free” movement of people inside the EU was accompanied by the construction of the European fortress – which works more like a filter than a fortress – built on the pillars of the Schengen agreement (Kofman and Sales, 1992; Cross the border, 1999; Andreas & Snyder, 2000; Geddes 2000; Favell and Hansen, 2002; Walters, 2002). Three recent events can illustrate the state of borderless Europe.

In January, 2003, in Switzerland the first electronic face recognition system was installed at Zürich airport. The purpose of the system is to make sure that refugees can be traced back to the flight on which they came in order to facilitate their deportation. The Swiss government also signed a treaty with Senegal for the construction of a detention zone at the airport of Dakar, where Swiss authorities want to deport all refugees from Western Africa until their identity and nationality has been established. The fact that this would lead to the construction of a Swiss deportation camp in Senegal, was a critique from civil rights organisations (*Der Spiegel*, 2002; Kramer, 2003).

In April, 2003, people in transit at the checkpoints at the Ukrainian-Polish border at Medyka-Shehyni were detained by an unofficial closure of the border. Most of them were involved in “ant trade,” earning their money by moving small portions of goods like alcohol, cigarettes, fruits or nuts between Ukraine and Poland. In the evening, the Polish border police closed their checkpoint arbitrarily long before the official closing time and did not allow anyone to cross the border. The people were caught in the “no (wo)man’s land” between Poland and Ukraine. Some of them attacked the Polish customs house and smashed the interior. Hours later, the border was reopened and the people were let through (TV Polska 16. and 17.4.2003, Wilk and Chlodnicki 2003).

In May, 2003, in an affluent town in the Southeast of England (Broxbourne/Hertfordshire in London’s commuting belt), a member of the British National Party (BNP) was elected as a member of the local council, gaining the majority of votes in one district. His victory came about through a campaign that was based on alleged “abuse” of the social system through refugees and a claim that a hotel in town had

been turned into a hostel for refugees. Not only the hotel, but the town itself, however, proved not to have a single refugee in residence. The BNP candidate had been elected on racist claims and fearmongering (Harris, 2003).

These three events provide a glimpse of the character of borders in Europe today. In the EU, many traits that Harald analysed come together. He suggests internal migration – within Canada – as a model for a borderless society, and that this internal freedom is associated with “citizenship exploitation,” and selective migration regulations into the country. The EU combines a utopian discourse on borderless Europe as a new, larger “inside”, with sophisticated mechanisms of discrimination. Inside, these also include transition periods for the citizens of the newly joining states of Central and Eastern Europe, who are not granted the full rights of mobility for an open-ended number of years. The elements of anti-utopia are numerous. At the “outer borders” of the EU, rigid boundaries are erected. The controls at these outer borders resemble the controls at the Berlin Wall, and are clearly more anti-utopian than utopian. An internal mass panic of imaginary “floods” of migrants prevails, fed mainly, but not exclusively by conservative and right-wing parties and media. The propaganda has in many states taken on such a scale that it can only be compared to Orwell’s “1984” and the war on “Eurasia” – the omnipresent enemy in a war that has only the purpose of keeping the society in check. Just as with the telescreen, the propaganda cannot be switched off. The propaganda and the apparent “removal” of EU-internal borders has been accompanied by the expansion of the activities of the border police across the whole territory of the EU – train lines, stations, highways, city centres all have become places where passports may be checked by border police. Airports are another site of science-fiction-like scenes. The controls that one undergoes on airports today, with their “deep questioning” resemble checks for androids in *Blade Runner*.

Within the EU, the movement of people is governed by a discourse on open borders and simultaneously by the extension of control across the whole territory. Outside, the EU enacts a body politics of migration, a fully geographical system which erects a strictly guarded core zone, “no (wo)man’s lands” and several layered outsides. Judging from this aspect of the society, we live in the anti-utopian space of societies of control.

However, the example of the EU also shows that the relation of critique, utopia and the contemporary world is not so easy. The call for open borders and free movement can be appropriated to enforce different structures of control. It can contribute to a strengthening of other borders like the new EU “outer” borders, and it can contribute to an internalisation of border control, as is happening across the EU territory. The example of the EU shows that free movement in itself does not mean a free society. As Harald pointed out, spatially flexible capitalism can celebrate the lowering of barriers to movement, without establishing freedom from exploitation.

### **Other Worlds of Borders and Migrations**

Borders however are the crucial zones of the states. Harald convincingly demonstrates that an analysis of migration and border control highlights the structures of global and national power relations. The critique of border regimes can thus be used to see clearer the deficiencies of our societies. Today, border camps draw attention to the

exclusionary border regimes and criticise the racism of European migration policy. In the 1980s, a Mr Dobilas, who was the Lithuanian champion of cross-country running, also championed the illegal crossing of borders. He crossed borders to draw attention to the totalitarian conditions in the states – he crossed into Finland, West-Berlin, and China, for example (Trusewicz, 2000).

Migration and border crossing are something more. The call for open borders can contribute to the establishment of free movement across the globe, but there is something equally important in the movement itself. Utopias that construct borderless societies highlight this potential. I have tried to expand the utopian mode that Harald accessed in his outlook. I have argued that although migration politics is not at the centre of the interests of most utopian novels, the drawing and the crossing of borders is central to them. Ursula K LeGuin and Marge Piercy – just like David Harvey – assume an ideal of relative spatial stability of local, relatively self-sufficient communities. The vision of a utopia of migration is simple: people live where they want to live. The world that emerges is not a world of total migration or nomadism. To describe these worlds and how they differ from those of today, the authors enact a travel story, a story of a transgression of borders. This crossing of borders drives the development of the stories, enables the encounter with difference, and represents a force for change in the contemporary world. Migration keeps things fluid and prevents fixity. It challenges the structures even of anarchist (“Odonian”) moons facing refugees from the capitalist planet Urras.

*‘They ask if they might be allowed to send people here.’*

*‘Send people here? Let Urrasti come here? Spies? -’*

*‘No, as settlers.’*

*‘They want the Settlement reopened, is that it, Bedap?’*

*‘They say they’re being hounded by their government, and are hoping for-’*

*‘Reopen the Settlement! To any profiteer who calls himself an Odonian?’*

(LeGuin, 1996, 292)

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