



Immigration and the Spectre of Hobbes: Some Comments for the Quixotic Dr. Bauder¹

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I had always thought that the purpose of More's Utopia was not to provide a blueprint for some future but to hold up for inspection the ridiculous waste and foolishness of our times, to insist that things could and must be better

(Harvey, 2000, 281).

Introduction

Geographers and other social scientists have for the most part ignored (or perhaps even consciously avoided) one of the most pivotal questions of justice in the twenty-first century – the question of ‘free movement’ and the elimination of national borders. In this regard, Bauder is to be commended for pointing to the ‘wastefulness and foolishness of our times,’ and for imagining an anti-Hobbesian world, a welcome antidote to the hypocrisy of so-called western democracies and the seemingly ‘reasoned’ analyses of liberal thinkers. His argument is by no means a new one, but it rekindles a stimulating and I would argue necessary debate.

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My concern in this response is not with quibbling over the empirical discussion of Canadian immigration policy (I shall leave this to specialists on the matter) but rather with what I think are the three crucial arguments of his paper – that an apparently liberal Canadian state is incompatible with more restrictive immigration policies; that immigration controls should be abolished, partly on the basis of economic and demographic reasoning; and that it is necessary to imagine a world without (national) borders.

Liberal Political Philosophy and Illiberal Policy

Bauder argues that the immigration policies of the Canadian government are incompatible with ‘its own’ liberal principles. He draws on the work of Cole (2000) who sees a glaring contradiction between liberal principles and closed borders. And yet, that the Canadian government pursues an exclusive immigration policy, while proclaiming itself a ‘liberal democratic state’, is far from surprising. Indeed, relying on Cole may be insufficient, because in this case, liberal philosophy is viewed as some form of ‘ground truth’ to which states must adhere. It is true, liberal philosophy underpins both constitutional law and wider institutions from schools to sports clubs, and its rhetorical and discursive effectivity is therefore considerable. But liberalism in the ‘west,’ like socialism, is an abstraction. In other words, there is, in practice, no pure state of liberalism, but rather ‘actually existing liberalism.’ For example, western states can and do mobilize against ‘threats to national security’ in ways that seem quite illiberal (Cole emollently refers to this as ‘liberal nationalism’). In a sense, liberal states act illiberally because governments believe there are threats to the very ‘liberal’ institutions and the rule of law that they seek to protect. If there is any merit in using Cole’s thorough and accomplished study, it is that it attacks western governments in a language they can understand. But again, governments have always found ways to circumvent the abstractions of liberal philosophy. This suggests that we might have to look elsewhere to offer a critical diagnostic of Canada’s and other western states’ immigration policies.

Capitalism, the Thick State and Immigration Policy

Understanding immigration policy as integral to the existence of capitalist states provides such an optic. Indeed, Bauder himself recognises this, focusing as he does on the class dimensions of state selective immigration policies designed to increase the competitiveness of the Canadian economy, while simultaneously protecting Canadian labour markets from downward wage pressure and the now skeletal welfare state. That is, in order to secure the conditions for capitalist accumulation, states need to manage their labour markets, whether this is through programmes to encourage entrepreneurialism, high-skilled immigration into business and labour-starved welfare sectors, or by ignoring the presence of ‘illegal’ immigrants (Raghuram and Kofman, 2002). Because even in the ‘knowledge-intensive’ capitalist countries, the latter satisfy a demand for low-paid/low-skilled jobs in specific sectors (see Samers, 2003, on France for example). Furthermore, the presence of asylum-seekers in liberal capitalist states does not harm the strength of the above argument.

Rather, as Bauder might recognise, the ‘enlightenment thinking’ that underpins equality and lies at the root of international refugee conventions figures centrally in the working of liberal states (however limited these conventions may be in their practical remit). But these are liberal *capitalist* states. In fact, the signing of international refugee conventions also carries with it a certain legitimacy within the ‘international diplomatic community,’ and hence may serve to boost capital accumulation through favourable trade agreements and other privileges accorded to signatory states. Thus, notions of (bourgeois) equality, justice and so forth serve as important (national) scripts which shape practices in so far as they do not disrupt the structural conditions necessary, but insufficient for capitalist accumulation (private property, wage labour, etc.). In short, Bauder’s critique of the shortcomings of liberal political philosophy and “Canadian values” (Canadian values?) is curious then, and the force of his critique lies only in its strength as influential political rhetoric.

Furthermore, while national states have “a monopoly over the legitimate means of mobility” (Torpey, 1998), the state is not monolithic. Critical legal scholars, political scientists, and sociologists of the state have long established the distinction between different constituent parts of the state. With respect to immigration policy, a number of political scientists have insisted on the distinction between the restrictionist state executive, racist factions of civil society, and the more expansive jurisprudence emanating from constitutional courts in the realm of immigration policy (Joppke, 1998; Guiraudon, 2000). Thus, without exaggerating the apparent liberalness of constitutional courts, the point is that there are glimpses already of a borderless world (both in terms of entry and settlement, and not simply for wealthy entrepreneurs and their families), whatever the formality of existing border controls (see for example Kostakopolou, 2002). No doubt, it would be dangerous to exaggerate these claims of more expansive jurisprudence. And I do not wish to mask the appalling experiences of asylum-seekers awaiting their status in detention centres, nor the informal racist and xenophobic practices of state, quasi-state or non-state entities that target ‘third world’ or ‘third-world looking’ migrants and asylum-seekers, nor the horrendous and inexcusable labour market and housing conditions of both undocumented and legal migrants (see for example Dummett, 2001). However, there may be some merit in pointing out these moves towards more expansive immigration policies, if only to ‘naturalise’ a world without (national) borders or ‘citizenship exploitation.’

A Critique of the ‘Scientific’ Foundations for Abolishing Immigration Controls

Bauder justifies the elimination of borders based on the use of economic and demographic arguments. Concerning the economic impact of migrant workers, he claims that

immigrants rarely displace Canadian workers ... they invest heavily in the Canadian economy ... are less likely to receive welfare payments than Canadian-born residents ... make a positive net contribution to the public treasury ... and ‘there is no evidence that immigrants pose an extra burden on the Canadian taxpayer’ (p. 167).

Persuasive rhetoric perhaps (the scientific ‘truth’ of the above is heavily debated), but as rhetoric, it relies on a troublesome logic. The logic is one that liberal nationalists, liberal economists, and neo-liberals deploy to argue for increased immigration, and in the case of anti-statist liberal economists, for the abolition of immigration controls, and even state ‘interference’ into the ‘workings of the market’ itself. In other words, Bauder’s argument for an end to immigration controls finishes by ‘economising’ immigrants and thus legitimising their economic evaluation. Immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees become ‘human capital’ rather than people (see for example Soguk, 1999) and it allows economists to debate their impact, sometimes negatively. As Borjas (1999) writes in the context of his research on the United States, one can “...conclude – by picking the ‘right’ period, the ‘right group’, and the ‘right’ methodology – that immigration has either a hugely beneficial or a very harmful impact on the labor market opportunities of native workers” (70). In any case, even some liberal theories of justice (for example Rawls’) dismiss economic debates. As Cole puts it:

[T]he lexical priority of the Liberty Principle over the other principles means that freedom of movement cannot be constrained by appeal to economic consequences; it can only be constrained in order to protect some other liberty that is equally or more important, or to strengthen the system of liberty as a whole (p. 140).

With respect to demographic projections, Bauder relies on Teresa Hayter’s (2000) claim that if the borders were opened up, this would only increase the population of the advanced economies by 2.5%. This is taken to be some reassuringly low figure, but such numbers are imaginary thresholds – what Kundnani (2001) calls ‘tabloid mythology.’ In fact, the whole discourse of quota immigration, which is based on some form of demographic or labour market calculation is a population policy dear to liberal nationalists. In sum, it is not to economic and demographic evaluation or prediction that we should turn, but rather to some other fundamental principle of humanity (if such a principle can be argued to exist). Furthermore, the ending of immigration controls to eliminate citizenship exploitation presupposes that humans are divided only by the extent of their wages, and that this is all that matters. This Marxist interpretation, based as it is on the argument of Van Parijs, neglects the importance of other dimensions of human existence (see for example Ignatieff, 1984), and indeed other potential lines of conflict. Thus, I agree with Bauder’s call for the abolition of immigration controls and the end of national borders, but for different reasons.

Normatively Speaking

Yet what then of the normative substance of Bauder’s argument? First, it is not entirely clear from his exegesis whether he is suggesting the end to national immigration controls (that is on entry), or the end of national citizenship (that is territorially-bounded political and social entitlements), and whether he is also extending his argument to poorer countries, and not simply the advanced economies. These are very different (if related) political scenarios and they have enormous implications for social justice and our critical imaginaries. Nonetheless, in Bauder’s

discussion, one has the impression that the normative foundations of his paper lie in dismantling borders or eliminating immigration controls *per se*, rather than in moving towards global equality. There may be more than a dose of uncritical ‘western’ romanticism in all of this. For example, Walzer notes that:

to tear down the walls of the state is not ... to create a world without walls, but rather to create a thousand petty fortresses [since] [t]he distinctiveness of culture and groups depends upon closure (1983, 39; cited in Black, 1996, 68).

We might disagree with Walzer’s utterly pessimistic assessment (and we might even disagree that his prediction is necessarily a bad thing), but it does raise questions about what sorts of political communities are possible or desirable in a post-border world (see below). The point of eliminating national immigration controls should not be to simply remove ‘citizenship exploitation’ in the rich countries, but to eliminate exploitation itself (and Bauder does seem to recognise this). The issue then becomes one of how the dismantling of immigration controls can contribute to global economic equality.

A Possible Political and Economic Community

Labour internationalism, socialism, Marxism (and even neo-classical regional equilibrium economics!) inspire the propositions that Bauder discusses in the context of a post-border world. As such, they tend to be *worker-centric* and the focus is therefore on labour mobility – that is the free movement of *workers*. Labour-centrism means that Bauder, like the practical suggestions he raises, is curiously silent on the migration of non-working dependents, and those who, for whatever reason, cannot work, cannot find available (waged?) work, or cannot migrate. (Incidentally, the Treaty of Rome that established the European Economic Community also accorded this fundamental right, but it is now raising far-reaching questions about citizenship rights across European states). This is more than an oversight, since for the non-working population, a national means of redistributing the surplus through taxation disappears as national citizenship – that is political and social closure based on territory – becomes impossible. In short, those who require ‘social protection’ lay bereft of state entitlements, and have to rely on some other sort of income to survive (family support if available, etc.).

Thus, if immigration controls are to be abolished then there must be compensating measures at some other scale, otherwise free movement (alongside frictionless capital and commodity movements) risks becoming a neo-liberal utopia (see Harvey, 2000). With free movement and the abolition of national citizenship, territories may reorganise politically and socially along income, bio-productive, service-oriented, ethno-religious or other identity lines. This is Walzer’s pessimistic scenario in which new ‘walls’ are constructed, and indeed it could prove very painful and violent. Yet as the Westphalian order collapses without immigration controls, a global state could emerge based on an already existing UN-type organisation. It could have the authority and power to intervene in order to ensure that immigration *and*

citizenship controls are not resurrected. Such a global state would have the powers of taxation or other means of distribution and be flexible enough to incorporate changing territorial forms. Each of these vastly different territories would have their own loose political structures, including (weighted) representation within the global state.

Consequently, while I share Cole's pessimism about anarchy, I do not share his aversion to a global state, but nor do I agree with Harvey that an 'electronic matching mechanism' that simply 'balances' population sizes and the inflow and outflow of migrants, is sufficient. Moreover, such a scenario may be downright objectionable. After all, Harvey's term 'balances' implies forced labour movements, which *may* be as equally unpalatable as immigration controls. I share with Harvey the pursuit of a non-hierarchical state, but the need to consider the lives of both wage workers *and* non-wage workers (domestic labour/'emotional labour', and so forth) not to mention the non-economic dimensions of social life, demands (I would argue) a globally central state. And it may very well have to be hierarchical (on these and other issues, see for example Nove, 1991). In short, the question of free movement becomes a question of the problems and possibilities of globally democratic socialism or a similar (as yet unknown) form of political and economic organization.

Concluding Remarks

In political thought and in theory, the category (or concept) of the 'real' should not be permitted to obscure that of the possible. Rather it is the possible that should serve as the theoretical instrument for exploring the real (Lefebvre, 2001, 769).

David Smith has recently argued that "No matter how persuasive philosophical argument might be, anything approaching free population movement still appears to be a right we are not ready for" (2003, 19). Is he right? Are we not ready for free population movement? How does he know that? Who exactly might the 'we' be? Is the world of national states accepted as the most natural, ineluctable and highest form of civilisation? That is, are 'we' haunted by the Hobbesian ghost? Many of us in 'western' states may not be ready. We accept that the world is complex, divided as it is by economic wealth, religious beliefs, political practices, and so on. 'We' even envision that some of these differences are irreconcilable; that a world without borders or immigration controls may resurrect old hatreds, bring with it violence, cultural dissolution, crippling insecurity, and new forms of poverty and inequality, especially for the 'unskilled' and the unemployed. (For a recent example, see the discussion of the dismantling of the 'Green Line' that divided Turkish from Greek Cyprus in the *Guardian*, 3 May, 2003). But how do these objections to free movement come to be? Some, such as Seidman (1995) see the roots of selective immigration policies in the selfishness of the rich world (although immigration controls are certainly not restricted to the rich countries of the north). Others locate such restrictionism in the cultural arrogance of 'western' countries (that is the assumption that Euro-American liberalism is the highest state of civilisation). Still others see the rise of securitarianism as a 'speech act', the result of escalating competition between control or security-related bureaucracies, or a way of regulating 'excess freedoms' (Huysmans, 2003). Whatever

lies at the origin of immigration controls, such perceptions, beliefs or ideologies cast their long shadow over a commitment to accepting other 'just', 'non-western' forms of living. More importantly, they may even eclipse the need to view human struggle on a global scale as both a means and end. In this sense, I have presented a possible scenario (rather than a blueprint) for a border-less world. If readers are not convinced, that is because I am calling less for a sketch of utopia than a non-teleological imaginary of global society. If imagination is to lead to practice, then this will have to involve an individual and collective exertion over the question of a cosmopolitan justice at another scale. Such is our task ahead.

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