

YOUNG AFRICA ON ITS WAY TO THE OLD CONTINENT

Stephen Smith, The scramble for Europe: Young Africa on its way to the old continent. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019, 200 pp.

Stephen Smith's book "The Scramble for Europe. Young Africa on its Way to the Old Continent" is an excellent and fruitful research of circumstances in Africa, quite unknown in the public discourse on migration in Europe. In this 200-page study and in five chapters, the author takes the angle that past research has incidentally been taken into account. It primarily takes on demographic facts and places the current migrant crisis in their context. The name itself says a lot about the basic idea behind the book - The Scramble for Europe is a derivation of the Scramble for Africa, which marks the period of colonisation of Africa by European invaders. Does this mean that the author talks about the same intention of African "conquerors" in the campaign against Europe? If we look at the photos of cluttered dinghies that land along the coasts of Europe, we may at some point imagine the ships of the conquistadors instead.

At the commencement, the author isolates his research from any political or moral framework (though we are not sure how readable a book can be without such assumptions), thereby seeking to keep away from any idealisation of homogeneity or diversity. It also excludes from its methodology migration factors that would determine them compulsory or willing, and seeks to address only demographic facts and historical experiences in order to make projections of a European

future in which, as it says, "many African families will have a nephew or a niece in Europe in the second half of the twenty-first century" (p. 4). The methodological warning refers to the "statistical tragedy" of Africa, in relation to which the author points out significant warnings (politically coloured census categories, rarely maintained censuses, insecure bureaucracy and the like), indicating unreliability but skepticism, since the exactness of data on Africa is beyond any reach. If readers are willing to accept this condition, the information presented in the book and the conclusions at its end will broaden perspectives on the current migrant crisis and help us better cope with its consequences in our countries, whether we are part of a transit route or a destination.

Contemporary Africa is in a situation where, among the current billion people in Africa, 4 out of 10 are under the age of 15, which means that the young population without voting rights is restored - the majority of the continent is not deciding. The phrase "African youth" is shown to be pleonasm. Uncontrolled population growth, rising youth participation and urbanisation have been the hallmarks of Africa for centuries. These "red flags" have been ignored in most studies that have examined the link between poverty and demographics. The European donors (most of them) kept their distance to Africa's population problems, as

well. An exception is a comment made by French President Emanuel Macron in 2017, which spoke without euphemism about the aid to Africa in the conditions of so many families. The labeling of his remark as racist raised the inevitable question: “how can we reconcile the total reset of family planning in Africa with full respect for continental cultures?” (P. 43). Political leaders in Africa know this too, so most, for reasons of maintaining power and political credibility, do not dare to gamble with reproductive habits. Despite a predominantly young population, Africa’s traditionally based gerontocracy provides long-standing leaders at its helm.

Bearing in mind UN reports, between 2015 and 2050 around 91 million people from developing countries are expected to move to the richest countries, which would mean a population drop of 20 million more than births during this period. Such a scenario would result in 82% of the demographic influx coming - from immigration (pp. 98-99). Immigration imbalances, however, will not change anything about global inequality. That is why, Smith states, the “Scramble for Europe” has not yet started in full swing. The key question is: what does it take for someone to decide to leave his/her country? Among the first things, discontent, resignation and futility. In order to be able to see the (un)developmental perspective of Africa, potential migrants must possess some, in Bourdieu’s terms, educational capital. Poverty is not just a material scarcity and it narrows the worldview to those facing the daily struggle to survive. That is why Smith states two crucial assumptions for launching the scramble for Europe:

the critical mass of Africans must exceed the threshold of minimum prosperity and this will be accomplished through the paradox of aid;

the existence of an African diaspora in the Old Continent, which would create the necessary networks for incoming migrants.

Young African migrants leave their home enforced by dysfunction of their countries which is reflected in their country’s inability to provide hope for a better future. In this context, the Mediterranean Sea remains the eternal link between Africa and Europe, through the Saharan migrant routes with the risks and costs of migration too high for many Africans: the networks of smugglers, kidnappers and hunters are especially counting on desperation. The author provides context for many details of the latest migration wave, without which the immigrants’ scramble remains in the hands of Europeans, to deal with it by building concrete and financial walls or opening the door to guilt-induced photographs of corpses on the shores of the Mediterranean. The dimensions of migration will also condition Europe’s future commitment to diversity or national identities, and consequently to the survival of a social system that finances minimal social needs in circumstances where 3/4 of Europe’s population in 2050 could be of African descent. In the end, whether Europe accepts a true melting-pot discourse through the rise of “Euroafrica”, or secures its borders following the “Fortress Europe”, idea or even decides to charge aid by mobilising new techniques of colonial governance, both Africa and Europe will be the losers of a new wave of migration.

Stephen Smith’s book is a dynamic learning experience that is rarely encountered. The value of this reading is enormous for anyone who wants to take a serious look at contemporary migration processes, but also for all young people who have felt a sense of hopelessness in their homelands. The fact

that young people of Africa decide to go into the unknown at all costs may not be the best for Europe or for themselves, but after

everything presented in this book, it will at least be easier to understand why they put all their stakes on it.

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