

Stephen Smith. *The Scramble for Europe: Young Africa on Its Way to the Old Continent.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019. viii + 197 pp. \$22.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-5095-3457-9.



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Published on H-Africa (October, 2021)

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Stephen Smith's *The Scramble for Europe: Young Africa on Its Way to the Old Continent* is a problematic book that extends the main claims and rhetorical strategies of Robert D. Kaplan's article "The Coming Anarchy."^[1] Smith addresses the complex issue of Africans' immigration to Europe by giving an alarmist and Eurocentric account of the rapid growth of the youth population in Africa and its threats to the economic and social stability of Europe. His main argument is that the unplanned and excessive growth of sub-Saharan Africa's demography, or what he refers to as "human geography," and the massive exodus of its youth to Europe will jeopardize the sociocultural and especially economic landscapes in Europe and the Global North.

The book's organization follows what Smith establishes to be three key stages in young sub-Saharan Africans' journey to Europe. After the introduction, the first three chapters explore the first moment of abandonment and ambitions. The fourth chapter offers a dubious discussion of the complex relations between Africa and Europe in

terms of migration and examines the different actors and policies that shape the trajectory of young Africans on their way to Europe, while the fifth chapter engages with the stage of integration in the European host society.

Despite insisting in the book's introductory chapter that his purpose "is not to stoke further controversy in debates around migration, but to provide a *factual* basis on which others can come to an informed view," Smith offers little reliable evidence to support his claim that "young Africa will rush towards the Old Continent in an inversion of Europe's 'Scramble for Africa' at the end of the nineteenth century" (pp. 4, 5, emphasis added). Instead, the author uses the analogy of Africa being the Mexico of Europe to suggest that the exodus of young Africans to Europe will lead to the replacement of white Europeans with African youth by 2050 and to report that "it was rumoured that the north [of Nigeria] had been counting its goats and sheep as citizens" (p. 31). Smith is quick to acknowledge that he does not tremble "at the prospect of an 'Africanization of

Europe” only to underscore right after that this seeming Africanization process “has been underway since the 1920s” and to dedicate the rest of the book to support his claim (p. 8). He contends this exodus has been caused by “war as a way of life” in sub-Saharan Africa, the lack of employment and the tension over access to decision-making in Africa gerontocratic society, and finally the idea that “Africa has not taken off yet” in terms of the number of Africans crossing the Mediterranean (p. 10).

Smith laments Europe’s little attention to this looming threat and failure to acknowledge that “the end of Europe” can become its reality in the foreseeable future. To take up this challenge and to draw the attention of journalists, columnists, and academics whose “heads [are] in the sand,” *The Scramble for Europe* seeks to join what the author considers to be a new and urgent scholarship on the human geography in contemporary Africa and its role in coming migratory waves that will impoverish Europe and eventually drastically change its demography and economy for the worse (p. 16). As a preemptive warning and concluding remark, Smith highlights that, despite his careful selection and skeptical attention to statistics and trends in Africa, he is well aware that “mathematical precision or even the illusion of exactitude ... is far beyond anyone’s reach” (p. 20).

In his discussion of the first stage of young Africans’ journey to Europe, Smith reiterates the well-known alarmist projections about Africa’s population: that after a long period of stagnation before European colonialism, Africa has experienced a demographic surge since the 1930s, due mainly to the French and British colonial emphasis on development and public health; that by 2050 Africa’s population will continue to increase to reach 2.5 billion and to double again by 2100; and crucially that Africans under the age of fifteen will represent about 60 percent of its population and thus a large majority of the world’s youth. To amplify the magnitude of these numbers, the author,

first, repeatedly emphasizes the case that the United Kingdom’s population would have been 725 million people by 2050. Second, he claims that statistics and trends about the growth of Africa’s population are often unreliable underestimations due to the “take or leave” attitude toward population figures he witnessed in Nigeria. And third, Smith notes the lack of demographic governance post-independence sub-Saharan Africa and “ad-hoc quality to family planning” (p. 43). This unregulated youth population growth south of the Sahara has turned Africa, according to Smith, to a wasteland of overpopulation, scarcity, religious and ethnic tribalism, chaotic rapid urbanization, political instability and gerontocratic rule, lack of maturity, the loss of colonial benefits, leapfrogging the green and industrial revolutions to a total consumerist society, the absence of modernity, climate change in Africa and the resulting ecological stress, and finally a Peter Pan syndrome that seemingly locks African youth in an immature role because of the overarching presence of their elders. Consequently, African youngsters “see it as their destiny to uproot and reinvent themselves elsewhere” (p. 96).

Concerning the second stage of the journey to Europe, Smith’s attempt to offer a nuanced discussion of the migrant crisis at the heart of the tension between Africa and Europe is not only convoluted but also deceitful. He summarizes a cascade of departures of sub-Saharan Africans that starts with the rural exodus from their villages to the urban centers in their countries, then to the regional hubs such as Lagos or Johannesburg, and finally to the exodus across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. Smith would not consider these immigrants to be victims of the various political and economic dangers but rather as the agents of a destructive quest to depart from a continent that gives no future. To the hellish scene of a sub-Saharan Africa with “no hope,” Smith laments the role European development aid plays in funding the clandestine voyage to Europe, since helping poor African countries to achieve prosperity can only

provide African youth with the means to join the rich European North, an act he considers to be akin to shooting oneself in the foot (p. 103). Eventually, these African migrants would make the European way of life “much grittier” (p. 124).

The last stage of the journey to Europe, according to Smith, is a virulent encounter between Africans and Europeans in the Global North. He first stresses the need to “de-moralize the debate on African migration to Europe” by moving it from important ethical implications to a real-politik of good governance (p. 134). To do so, he opposes the right of free movement, supports Europe’s strategy to barricade its frontiers, and claims that Africans and Europeans live in different times, with Europeans being at the forefront of modernity and African migrants coming from a different temporality of successive time epochs. And thus, these migrants should abide by the culture and politics of their European hosts and completely assimilate to their lifestyle instead of importing their “Africa’s homophobia” (p. 159). To illustrate, Smith criticizes the deep “rancor” of the African diaspora and public intellectuals in Europe because of their seeming resentment toward their host countries, their former colonizers, and the role their migratory remittances plays in funding the massive migration of African youth (p. 160).

Since the “scramble for Africa” has not yet materialized, Smith suggests possible scenarios for the quandary that Europeans have to live for the next two generations before Africa emerges from its state of hopelessness and underdevelopment. First, the “Eurafrica” scenario would translate to Europe’s full embrace of Africans’ mass immigration, which would entail the end of European social security. “Fortress Europe” is the second familiar option of securing Europe’s borders and disregarding the right of asylum. The third scenario, “Mafia Drift,” is equally alarming and sees the proliferation of human trafficking, while the fourth option is “the return of the protectorate,” as in the

re-colonization of Africa by European powers (p. 173). Smith’s preferred solution centers on “bric-a-brac politics” where the European Union halts African migration “for two or three generations” until Africa eventually develops economically and politically so then many Afro-Europeans will decide to return to their African home (p. 174).

The Scramble for Europe blurs the line between a serious academic book and a polemic op-ed. Right from the introduction, the reader is challenged with sweeping generalizations, superficial references to famous theorists and concepts without any analyses or explanations, and excessive data and conceptual dump. Smith, a professor of the practice of African and African American studies at Duke University and holder of a PhD in semiotics from Berlin’s Free University, gained his knowledge and expertise about sub-Saharan Africa from his long journalistic experience as the deputy editor of the foreign desk at the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* and the Africa editor at *Libération*. This has infused Smith’s writing more with the style and jargon of daily popular journalism and less with the objective analysis and discussion of specific research theory and data.

A salient feature in Smith’s writing on the complex issue of Africans’ immigration to Europe is the incapacity to engage meaningfully and carefully with the various theoretical concepts that organize his take. For instance, he refers to Hannah Arendt’s “politics of pity” and Giorgio Agamben’s “bare life” but he never discusses them. This gets more puzzling when Smith misreads such African works as Chris Abani’s novel *Graceland* (2004) and Ousmane Sembène’s movie *The Money Order* (1969) as anthropological documents. Finally, despite his insistence on the need to demoralize and nuance the debate, Smith is content to agree with and even defend the central theses of such flawed texts as Kaplan’s “The Coming Anarchy” and Renaud Camus’s *The Great Replacement* (2011).

Smith's book is a book of its time. With the rise of far-right ideology in Europe and the Global North, there is also a lucrative market for pseudo-academic validations of the most racist and xenophobic claims that objectivize and dehumanize the other. *The Scramble for Europe* is a dubious addition that has since its publication excited those who believe in the isolationist project of "Fortress Europe."

Note

[1]. Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic* (February 1994): <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1994/02/the-coming-anarchy/304670/>.

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Citation: Haythem Guesmi. Review of Smith, Stephen. *The Scramble for Europe: Young Africa on Its Way to the Old Continent*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. October, 2021.

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