

PAUL MORLAND

A Place in the Shade

Nomad Century: How to Survive the Climate Upheaval

By Gaia Vince

(Allen Lane 176pp £20)

As an ancient Greek poet taught us and Isaiah Berlin reminded us, the hedgehog knows one thing and the fox knows many things. Midway through *Nomad Century* – or more accurately around two thirds of the way through – Gaia Vince transforms herself from a hedgehog to a fox. It makes for an uneven book of two very different parts in which the author describes the challenges of, and prescribes solutions to, ‘the climate upheaval’.

There is no doubt that Vince is most reliable as a fox. The latter part of *Nomad Century* is full of common sense and useful observations. As a fox, she is the very opposite of a catastrophiser. She is brave in acknowledging that large parts of the globe will actually benefit from warmer temperatures and that, whatever its drawbacks for humans, more carbon is good for plant growth. She recognises the benefits of modern farming methods and the fact that the more intensive they are, the less extensive they need to be, leaving more space for nature to thrive. Vast areas once tilled by humans have already been abandoned to natural flora and fauna thanks to increasing yields per acre. Vince is optimistic about advances in the generation of low- or zero-emission energy and has little truck with those who want us to rein in our lifestyles for reasons of puritanical zeal rather than ecological necessity.

In the larger, hedgehoggy part of the book, Vince makes the case that, given the impending climate disaster, we must open the doors of the wealthy, cooler north to the growing masses of the soon-to-be-uninhabitable south, welcoming the ethnic transformation of our societies. ‘This is the century of unprecedented, planetary human movement,’ Vince enthuses. But the vast relocations of populations she proposes are neither necessary nor practical. And they are certainly not inevitable.

Indeed, Vince herself – unwittingly, we assume – argues against her own polemic. She says that the velocity of climate change

is on average 0.42 km per year, meaning that after a century, places in the northern hemisphere will on average have the climate of somewhere currently 42 km further south. A shift in the climate of Potters Bar to that of Croydon over the course of a hundred years hardly seems to be the kind of change which necessitates the immediate shipping of millions or even billions of people from Ghana to Greenland or from Nigeria to Nova Scotia.

Warnings of places becoming uninhabitable are nothing new. We are told in *Nomad Century* about how in 2014 the small Pacific nation of Kiribati purchased territory in Fiji, since Kiribati was becoming ‘unliveable’ due to rising sea levels. But since then, the population of Kiribati has gone up by more than 10 per cent, its life expectancy has risen an additional year and the infant mortality rate is down the best part of 20 per cent. It sounds like it is becoming more liveable, or at least more, not less, lived in.

Forecasts can be and often are inaccurate. For example, in 2018 the BBC reported that Lake Chad had largely dried up. A year later no less an authority than *The Guardian* informed us that Lake Chad was in a stable condition or even expanding. The countries which surround the lake have some of the fastest-growing populations in the world as well as some of the fastest-rising life expectancies (life expectancy has increased by more than a decade in Niger, for example, since the start of the century), suggesting they are not so unliveable. If Vince had spirited off the region’s millions to a new life in the bracing climate of Iceland upon seeing the bad news on the BBC in 2018, by the following year, enlightened by *The Guardian*, she might have been obliged to spirit them back.

There are other flaws in the argument for the necessity, never mind the urgency, of the author’s scheme. Climate change, the best authorities argue, will be more pronounced in and around the poles – where she wishes humanity to relocate – than in the tropics. It is notable that even in these

days of ‘climate emergency’, the population grows far faster in precisely those places we are told are becoming uninhabitable than it does in the cooler temperate zones. Even within single countries, we notice the same effects. In the United States, for instance, it remains sunbelt states which continue to attract population growth. Vince would, I suspect, find it difficult to persuade retiring New York Boomers that they really want to relocate to Hudson Bay rather than to Florida. And warnings of impending calamity will not persuade them either: globally, deaths from natural disasters are at less than a tenth of their level a hundred years ago.

But whatever the challenges posed by climate change, the sheer impracticality, political and logistical, of building huge new cities towards the polar regions to house the masses fleeing the tropics is the strongest argument against the case made in this book. To convince us of the need for such a project, the author has first to persuade us that the very idea of the nation-state is an illusion born out of the Industrial Revolution and (confusingly) invented in France. She may have read Ernest Gellner, but has she read Anthony Smith and other scholars of nationalism, who have demonstrated that the concept of a nation, continuous by history and geography, goes back a lot further than the 19th century? In a Europe of Viktor Orbán and Marine Le Pen and in an America where Donald Trump might win another presidential election, Vince will have to work hard to convince politicians and electorates to abandon any notion of immigration control. If she can’t convince them, her solution is to endow the UN with ‘executive powers’ and the ability to enforce them – the stuff of ‘world government’ conspiracy fantasies.

There are compelling reasons to support immigration in countries where indigenous populations seem uninterested in reproducing themselves. In Europe and North America, the demographic and economic pressures for inflows from the developing world are immense, but ultimately they can only happen with the democratic consent of citizens. Many factors, including politics, economics, technology and above all demography, will determine whether there are great population movements between now and the end of the century. Despite Gaia Vince’s urgent appeal, climate change is unlikely to be among them.

PAUL MORLAND

Between Battlefield & Fortress Europe

My Fourth Time, We Drowned: Seeking Refuge on the World's Deadliest Migration Route

By Sally Hayden

(Fourth Estate 496pp £20)

Sometime in the middle of the last decade, Essey left Sudan for Libya in the hope of making it to the promised land north of the Mediterranean. After a 1,400-kilometre journey with little food or water, instead of reaching the coast and heading for nirvana, Essey found himself in the hands of armed men who extorted thousands of dollars from his family while holding him in appalling conditions. He became weak and ill while his family continued to be fleeced. His plight is one of many recorded in Sally Hayden's record of the great exodus of Africans hopeful of reaching Europe.

Amid the chaos of civil war, Libya has become, in the words of the former chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, 'a marketplace for the trafficking of human beings'. As Hayden writes in her passionate and eloquent book, none of this has prevented Libya from being elected to the UN's Human Rights Council. Not that we should be surprised: the representative of Gaddafi's brutal regime chaired the Human Rights Council's equally grotesque predecessor, the Human Rights Commission, earlier this century. Another UN agency, the High Commissioner for Refugees, is depicted as no better, too often turning out to be part of the problem rather than the solution.

Hayden is angry about not only the suffering of those who seek to reach European shores from Africa but also the international institutions that are supposed to support them. The great virtue of the book is its exposure of widespread abuse and corruption. The author gives powerful voice to those who too often are voiceless. In this she has done them – the fugitives, migrants and refugees – and her readers a service. These are voices all of us should hear, belonging to people fleeing their homelands for a variety of reasons – military, economic, political and even epidemiological – and seeking to build safer, healthier and more prosperous lives in the developed world.

The Fourth Time, We Drowned is a work of reportage. It benefits from the strengths of the genre but also suffers from its weaknesses. It is remorseless in its exposure of one of this century's greatest scandals and sources of suffering. Desperation, detention and death haunt these pages. Hayden is a young and courageous journalist who is prepared to put herself on the line in defence of the vulnerable. On the downside, the book is something of a case of 'one damned thing after another': damned and damnable though the things Hayden chronicles undoubtedly are, they come at the reader remorselessly, in no particular order. In place of structure, Hayden offers us indignation; in place of argument, outrage. None of which is to denigrate this excellent

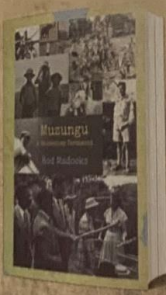
work but rather to point out its limitations, which are essentially twofold and, in a word each, relate to context and policy. Context is required to give a rounded view of 'why'. Policy is needed to provide the 'what next'.

As far as context is concerned, Hayden assumes that the mass flight of Africans is essentially to do with the awfulness of their situation. But that is not the whole truth. For sure, many Africans are seeking to escape poverty and reach the gold-paved streets of the Europe of their imagination. But it is only in the world of the internet, the mobile phone, increasing urbanisation, rising incomes and more affordable travel that such dreams can be countenanced. Life in many parts of Africa has long been nasty, brutish and short, but it is increasingly ceasing to be so. Take Sierra Leone, a country the author covers. At around eighty per thousand, its infant mortality rate is one of the world's worst – more than twenty times that of the UK. But it is about one third of what it was in the early 1950s. Indeed, it has halved since the late 1990s. Life expectancy may only be in the mid-fifties but as recently as the turn of the century it was in the high thirties. The dramatic improvement in conditions is why its population has almost doubled over the last twenty-five years.

As for policy, Hayden seems to suggest that any limitation on immigration is inhumane and that failure to provide safe passage is a form of culpability. But what, we must ask, might be the alternative to the policies currently in place in Europe? It could only be to provide safe passage to all who wish to come. The result would be the arrival of hundreds of millions. How many people would stay in Afghanistan, Syria or Chad if the alternative were a free flight to London, Berlin or Paris, followed by the provision of housing, health care and education? Such a policy would break the developed world; well before that, it would be utterly rejected by electorates. As long as the politics of democracy and the economics of reality prevail, any such policy is inconceivable.

Better, surely, are efforts to foster human rights, peace and economic development in the places where these journeys begin in the first place. This will ensure that the young of Africa do not risk the perils of the open sea but instead stay at home to help build the societies which so desperately need them.

A vivid confessional memoir of a strange and often frightening childhood in late colonial Africa and the story of all that followed in the years after.



Muzungu
A Rhodesian Testament
Rod Madocks

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Dogberry Books