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Since the beginning of this year a relentless flow of images from the Italian island of Lampedusa, the city of Calais where the Eurotunnel starts, Bodrum in Turkey, the eastern islands of Greece, or the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco, are invading television screens and media outlets. They portray massive scale attempts by desperate souls trying to reach European countries. The European Union commissioner in charge of migration declared this month this is the worst migrant crisis since World War II. Is it?

Maybe for Western Europe it is perceived as such, but it is not. Understanding why is important, because more is coming.

Migration has been part of the human journey since the sophisticated apes started moving out of the Rift Valley in Africa. The history of humanity is so rich and complex that we have difficulties relating to a very remote common origin, except for historical assessments and philosophical statements. It is easier for all to link to a more recent past, the one that through events and social interaction shaped our identities. Human beings have a selective reading of history. For most compensation will be justified for a wrong done to some, but not others. Apologies will be fine with some, but not others. Peace offers will be morally acceptable to some, but not others. This is after all mimicking individual behaviour at a larger, societal level.

Most Italians forgot they created entire nations such as Argentina and Uruguay. The British do not necessarily remember that Australia and New Zealand were created through migration, nor do the Spanish and Portuguese when it comes to South America. When referring to Indochina, the Chinese must have only a vague idea why that region carries their name. Americans will find it in bad taste to mention that part of the current US was bought from Mexico. The list is vast.

Still, one continent in recent history has never been associated with migration to colonize or profit from other regions richness: Africa! If anything Africa is rather known for suffering from slavery, plundering of its natural resources and unfair international treatment.

Africa has struggled more than most to find a way out of poverty. It has been doing better of late, since the turn of the century in fact, posting growth rates above the world's and developing countries' average. Yet the narrative about the continent seems to be fixated on migration and negative assessments of its performance. It is, therefore, important, first to understand why Africa is perceived to be generating more migrants today than ever before.

African countries receive a lot more migrants than the continent exports abroad. In fact the bulk of Africans looking for opportunities outside their countries go to another African country. Less than 2-million seek a destination abroad every year, which is a tiny number in relation to migrant stocks, particularly in Europe. Of the quarter of a million who have tried the Mediterranean route this year the largest contingent are Syrians, with about 50,000. This is a fraction of those settled in Lebanon. Afghans, Yemenis, Pakistanis and other non-Africans use the route too.

Europe's pull factor is to be understood through a variety of developments, from information access, human rights proclamations, a call for universal moral values all the way to unfair distribution of income and inequality across the globe. Terrorism and religious extremism have played a role as well. It looks as if the strong European rights advocacy has worked to its detriment.

Pockets of war such as Libya and its surrounding deserts, the Great Lakes and its neighbourhood, and long embattled Somalia are generating political asylum seekers and massive number of refugees as well. Harsh African regimes contribute their lot. The shyness shown by African leaders when migration is a theme is disturbing. But still this does not give us the full story.

In every moment of history, growth has generated outward migrants from the same location. It is indeed happening with Chinese and Indians right now as it is in Africa. Growth spins the chances for a new life but its distribution, particularly at the early stages of a country's take-off, is uneven and unpredictable. Those who see their neighbour with means and hope that they do not have, venture out. It would have been absurd to propose bombing the boats that were sailing to South America full of migrants escaping the aftermath of two world wars. These migrants were seeking better lives. Yet their countries were growing like never before, thanks among other things to the Marshall Plan.

Africans dying in the desert or the sea are the determined lot. They do not accept their fate and are ready to risk their lives. The youngest population of the world sees the developed nations of Europe as the closest beacon of hope. For them it is the home of human rights that will, certainly, understand their plight and welcome them to work!

Africa will keep growing when the rest of the world will be ageing. The difficulty of admitting that the

current state welfare in all ageing countries is unsustainable has led to the most bizarre economic policy proposals. Accepting that there is a demographic challenge would imply a vast overhaul of social and political choices to sustain the economy. As we all witness the limits of the transfer of value from production and labour to knowledge and financial control, we are also seeing the limits of the prevailing economic model. A demographic equilibrium is still essential despite technological progress and productivity gains. Social security or pension funds cannot be contributed towards by robots or intellectual property; they require people, workers, and productive workers indeed. That is why Europe will have to come to grips with its need for migrants, as the European Union Commission has acknowledged many times.

The 2000 or so known deaths on the Mediterranean Sea, are a tragic wake-up call. Between now and 2050 Africa will double its population. Even if it grows as quickly or faster than it is doing right now, it is likely to generate a much bigger flow of young Africans looking for opportunities in an ageing Europe.

The extraordinary and still amazing bravery of the European explorers, facing unknown seas and geography with only scarce scientific tools for orientation and survival has been celebrated. It is an extraordinary demonstration of human determination. That same bravery is displayed by today's migrants. And they are tuning into Europe. Payback time?