

TIME Magazine and the “Africa is Rising” Meme

TIME Magazine has copied what *The Economist* did in 2011, and decided “Africa is Rising.” Again. This week’s European edition is taken over by stories on this theme. Alex Perry, who writes for *TIME* from Cape Town (remember [his style](#)) has [a piece](#) where, despite the cover title, he does not come to any real conclusion. We’ve written about this meme and [its various iterations on film, at TED conferences and on blogs before](#) (it will also be the focus of [a—hopefully critical—conference at Harvard next April](#) by super anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff; they’re already [teaching a course by the same name](#)) and we are not sure what is gained by all this hot air. Whether it is “Hopeless Continent” or “Africa Rising,” these kinds of totalizing narratives of the continent are banal and outdated. Of course it is easier to write yet another new beginning for the continent (or rebrand it, if you prefer), than to offer substantial engagement with the current situation. Perry and co really need to beef up on their history if they are to cut it as serious commentators and reporters. Take for example:

As Africa marks half a century since it began to free itself from colonialism, its future lies in the hands of hundreds of millions of young Africans who, like [Kenyan photographer Boniface] Mwangi [featured in Perry’s article], must choose between Africa rising and Africa uprising.

What a choice. If you’re talking about, say, South Africa or Nigeria (and I bet Kenyans would agree), I think we’d take uprising, thank you very much.

* Elliot Ross did more than co-write this post. H/T [How We Made it in Africa](#).

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