

WHY WE SHOULDN'T SEEK AN AFRICAN MILLENNIUM

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the concept of an “African millennium” is rejected when employed as a topic for discussion by economists, or worse, when it becomes (implicitly or explicitly) the goal of economic policy. The paper traces the intellectual roots of concepts such as the “American century” and the “African millennium” and criticises this introduction of (neoconservative) idealism in the debate on public policy. Further, the concept of an African millennium is criticised as historiographically naïve using some insights from post-modern historiography. The practical danger against which this paper cautions is the possible drift into utopianism or social experimentation as policymakers try to match complex reality to their idealised model.

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INTRODUCTION

When King Lear heard of his daughters' treachery and his diminished estate, he was consumed by a "noble anger" and vowed to "...do such things, what they are, yet I know not; but they shall be the terrors of the earth" (Shakespeare, 1982: 844, paragraph 280). There is a shadow of this Lear in the drive by African leaders for an *African Millennium* (or, more modestly, an *African Century*): As with Lear they are animated by a sense of unjust injury, and as Lear they are plotting a mighty response and as with Lear's design we do not know the substance of their strategy, except that it will be mighty.

I do not wish to stretch the analogy and sigh with Goneril that our President (as others) "...hath put himself from rest, and must needs taste his folly" (Shakespeare, 1982: 845, paragraph 290), but I will argue that an *African Millennium* is not an expedient focus for public policy in this country, or anywhere on the continent. The argument is that (neoconservative) idealism is a poor guide for policy in the absence of an unlikely unanimity on values in any country but more so across a continent, and that applied idealism leads either to frustrated expectations in this complex world, or to repression, should policymakers wish to shape a simple enough reality to match the ideal.

The first section of this paper traces the idealistic roots of the African millennium concept, while the second section judges the use of this concept from the

perspective of post-modern historiography. The relevance of this for an economics conference and for an economics journal is the call by politicians for policy makers to pursue the African millennium, and the participation of economists in that process requires reflection on the entire project

1. SCRATCHING OUT "AMERICA"

The "American century" was no so much discovered as called forth one fine day in 1941 when the American journalist Henry Luce challenged his fellow citizens in a now famous editorial of the *Life Magazine* to "...create the first great American Century" (Luce, 1999 [1941]: 171). Nearly sixty years later, as the century was drawing to a close, President Mbeki was not to be outdone when at the African Renaissance conference in September 1998 he shared his conviction that not only the "peoples of Africa", but also "people of goodwill throughout the world, will join us in a sustained offensive which must result in the new century going down in history as the African century" (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]: xxi).

This section returns to Luce's original challenge to see whether this is the appropriate vision for policy in this country and for those of our neighbours and their neighbours across this continent.

There are two particularly interesting features to the historical context of Luce's article²: firstly, it was written at a time of considerable dissatisfaction in America; at least that is how Luce saw it, for his article starts with a litany of complaints: "We Americans are unhappy. We are unhappy about America. We are not happy about ourselves in relation to America. We are nervous – or gloomy – or apathetic" (Luce, 1999 [1941]: 159). The American situation contrasted sharply with the British who, on his interpretation were "profoundly calm", despite the Luftwaffe.

Secondly, Luce was writing at the high water mark of American isolationism, at a time when Americans were agonising over the possibility, the desirability, the cost of entering another European war. And he admitted that their involvement (such as it was, in terms of hardware and money) at that time was due to defence and that such a defensive stance may be sustainable indefinitely. More importantly, he acknowledged that entering the war risked creating a government powerful enough that their constitutional democracy may be imperilled; they risked winning a war and losing their country.

Against all these reasonable doubts Luce chose to argue that the time had come for America to assume that leadership of the world, which they had long refused. America could choose against isolationism and for

² Luce wrote in 1941 as the USA was increasingly involved in the material production for the War, but before they had committed any actual troops to the War. Indeed, there was still a German embassy in Washington at the time.

internationalism, and (this was Luce's most advanced point) such a case for war could be built around "big words like Democracy and Freedom and Justice" (Luce, 1999 [1941]: 165). In this way Americans would accept their position as the "most vital nation in the 20th Century", and it would be a good thing for all the world when that happens and "America's first century" finally arrives.

Luce built his case for American internationalism around four central observations about the 20th century: firstly, the world's population (then numbering 2 billion) were for the first time, "fundamentally indivisible"; secondly, there existed a widespread and fundamental rejection of war; thirdly, for the first time, the world economy promised comprehensive poverty relief; fourth, "the world of the 20th Century, if it is to come to life in any nobility of health and vigour, must be to a significant degree an American Century"³ (Luce, 1999 [1941]: 167-168).

Finally, Luce had a four point agenda for the delivery of the American century: firstly, in the economic sphere it fell to America to determine whether the decentralised system would prevail against the economic dictatorship of collectivism. Secondly, America would have to provide a lead (which the world would welcome) in artistic and

³ Whereas Luce offered arguments to support the first three observation, the final point was apparently so obvious that he only needed to remind the reader of the "...belief – shared let us remember by most living men – that the 20th Century must be to a significant degree an American Century" and he added that "...American prestige throughout the world is faith in the good intentions as well as in the ultimate intelligence and ultimate strength of the whole American people" (Luce, 1999 [1941]: 168, 169).

scientific fields. Thirdly, in those troubled times America would have to share charitably with the entire world. But all of these will come to nothing without a fourth initiative, that is a “devotion to great American ideals” (Luce, 1999 [1941]: 170). But if and when these come to pass we would see and welcome the “first great American Century” (Luce, 1999 [1941]: 171).

Before considering Luce’s argument critically I wish to juxtapose his argument with the case for an African century as it was made by President Mbeki at the African Renaissance conference in Johannesburg during September 1998.

At the outset we notice a certain similarity between the contemporary African situation and that of the America on the brink of the second World War. First, President Mbeki (1999 [1998]) referred to the hardships and poverty of daily life for many Africans, the “disempowerment of the masses”, “the deification of arms” and so on in a litany of rather more corporeal sufferings than the psychological afflictions of which Luce spoke. Second, Africa is the most isolated part of a globalising world, in terms of trade⁴, interconnectivity⁵ and capital markets⁶ and Luce was calling Americans from their isolationism.

⁴ African economies remain relatively closed, despite efforts at liberalising trade regimes especially during the nineties. On the Sachs and Warner (1997) index of openness African economies score on average 0.1 compared with 0.65 for the OECD and 0.83 for East Asia (Sala-i-Martin, 2003).

⁵ In the year 2000 there were only 2.5 million internet users on the African continent, which was less than the number for Sweden (Norris, 2000).

Where Luce had argued for Americans to assume leadership of the world, for the sake of big words: Democracy, Freedom, Justice; Mbeki offered a big word of his own, the “African Renaissance”; and for him the challenge is “... to mobilise and galvanise the forces inside and outside government which are the bearers of this spirit [against neo-colonialism], so that they engage in a sustained national and continental offensive for the victory of the African renaissance” (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]: xix).

Let us also see if Mbeki matched Luce’s four observations about the 20th century, with similar observation about the 21st on which to build an argument for an African Renaissance: The first observation about the indivisibility of humankind is even truer for the present day population of 6 billion than for the 2 billion of Luce’s day. Mbeki is all too aware of the process of globalisation and challenges Africans to engage critically with its various dimensions. Indeed there is an edge to his own evaluation of globalisation, especially his adherence to controversial hypotheses about the presumed exploitative character of the international economy⁷ (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]: xvii).

⁶ Africa is not isolated in terms of capital flows, as such, where the disinvestment by African, variously estimated at between 25% and 125% of GDP makes this one of the most globalised continents in terms of capital flows (Ibi Ajayi, 2001). Rather, most African financial markets remain underdeveloped, illiquid and local.

⁷ Mbeki argued “...that we are subjected to the strange situation that the process of the further reproduction of wealth by countries of the North has led to the creation of poverty in the countries of the South” (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]: xvii).

Luce's second observation concerned the widespread and fundamental rejection of war. Perhaps this consensus no longer holds; and there is certainly evidence of new life in the old doctrine of a just war, even if it is preventative. President Mbeki did not substitute an alternative consensus in his African Renaissance conference speech, except perhaps "democracy...a stance of opposition to dictatorship" (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]). But more recently he identified a negative contemporary consensus, that is: "all thinking people throughout the world recognise the fact that global poverty constitutes the deepest and most dangerous structural fault in the contemporary world economy and global human society" (Mbeki, 2003: 1). Let this consensus against global poverty substitute for Luce's consensus against war.

As a third observation Luce mentioned the ability of the world economy to relieve poverty comprehensively. That observation is implicit in Mbeki's consensus about the fight against poverty, too, and the decades since Luce have confirmed our continued optimism on this front as the second half of the 20th century was what Rudiger Dornbusch called the "best century ever" with the optimistic lesson that "...even daunting setbacks like depression and war are only momentary tragedies – buying opportunities, if you like – in a relentless advance of the standard of living and the scope for enjoying better lives" (Dornbusch, 2000: 3).

Luce's final observation was the unsubstantiated claim that the future prosperity of the world depended on it following

the American lead in the first “American century.” Against this we have the unsubstantiated claim by Mbeki that “...the peoples of Africa share a common destiny...[and] that people of goodwill throughout the world will join us in the sustained offensive which must result in the new century going down in history as the African century” (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]: xxi).

Luce also suggested a vague four point agenda for achieving the American century, and we can find a comparable agenda for the African century: firstly, to “save humanity from the impending catastrophe...” (Mbeki, 2003: 6) the African century would temper the enthusiasm for the decentralised system⁸ (which was the American task) with “...a vigorous, sustained and successful intervention by the school of progressive politics” (Mbeki, 2003: 6). Just as the American century would require American leadership in the fields of art and science, so too there is a burden on artists and the intelligentsia of Africa to “...secure our equitable space within a world affected by a rapid process of globalisation and from which we cannot escape” (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]: xxi).

Thirdly, where American’s would have had to share charitably with the world in their century, the African century would be one of partnership between the

⁸ President Mbeki is sometimes more emphatic on this point, for example when he called for progressive politicians” to devise an (invariably centralised) alternative that would “...break the icy ideological grip of the skinny hand of right wing politics” (Mbeki, 2003: 6), since “...it is impossible to solve the problem of global poverty solely through reliance on ‘the market’” (Mbeki, 2003: 4).

developed and developing worlds. Finally, just as nothing would have come of the American century without “devotion to great American ideals”, so to the African century requires “...new African patriots who,... join in the struggle to bring about an African renaissance in all its elements” (Mbeki, 2003: xxi)

There are, evidently, many parallels between Luce and Mbeki’s respective calls American and African Centuries. Most fundamentally, both projects are a call for leadership and action in the service of high ideals. The most striking difference is that the American century was an internationalising of something already in existence, whereas the African century would first “recall everything that is good and inspiring in our past” (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]: xxi) and catapult it, as it were, into the future and across the nations.

Perhaps the two projects are so similar that the African century is just the American century with the “America” scratched out? If this were the case, then two arguments should pacify our zeal for the African century: the first is the transfer of the widespread antipathy that is felt against what is called the neo-conservative (or neocon) agenda in US politics to an African version of neo-conservatism. Secondly, the intellectual standing of projects such as the call for the American century has been undermined by the intellectual developments that are roughly grouped under the banner of post-modernism. The same would be true of a project for an African century.

One interpretation of modern US politics that has recently

been gaining adherence is that neo-conservative ideas have been a rising influence in US foreign policy in the wake of 11 September, 2001. The neo-conservative doctrine reminds of Luce's arguments as⁹, according to Fidler and Baker, they:

“...see America as exceptional in history ... [and are] permeated by optimism about the ability of America to transform it [the world]...[as] they celebrate American power as a force for moral good in the world...” (Fidler and Baker, 2003: 11).

That the neocon drive for an American empire is widely resented in uncontroversial. It is not clear why the drive for an African version of neoconservatism should be any less offensive. Ultimately both are idealistic attempts to remake the world; and both require at a minimum that American or African values be “widely held and spread” (Fidler and Baker, 2003: 11). Again it would hardly raise an eyebrow at this conference to argue that American values neither are, nor should be, held universally. Why is it any less

⁹ Indeed, one the most prominent neocon think-tanks in Washington is called the Project for the New American Century. On their homepage - <http://www.newamericancentury.org/> - we find an updated version of Luce's argument as their vision: “The Project for the New American Century is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to a few fundamental propositions: that American leadership is good both for America and for the world; that such leadership requires military strength, diplomatic energy and commitment to moral principle; and that too few political leaders today are making the case for global [American] leadership.”

controversial to argue that there are African values which are widely held or should be spread?

Further, the “big idea” that drives the African century is President Mbeki’s vision of an African renaissance. But this is an ironic association for any continent-wide project¹⁰, especially when combined with energetic participation by the necessarily centralising contribution of progressive politicians, summoned in Mbeki (2003). It is ironic because at the very heart of the renaissance (historically, at least) lies the realisation that many (even fundamental) values are not shared and that it is up to the individual to assume responsibility without a fool proof moral compass, as Lord Acton observed: “A new type of man began with Petrarca, men accustomed to introspection, who selected their own ideals, and moulded their minds to them” (Acton, 1921: 73); or as the contemporary British historian Norman Davies summarised the essence of the renaissance:

“The essence of the Renaissance lay not in any sudden rediscovery of classical civilisation but rather in the use which was made of classical models to test the authority underlying conventional taste and wisdom...and it is connected with the stirrings of science – that is, the principle that nothing should be taken as true unless it can be tried and demonstrated. In religious thought, it was a necessary precondition for Protestant emphasis on the individual conscience. In politics it gave emphasis to the idea of the sovereign state as opposed to the community of Christendom, and hence the beginnings of modern

¹⁰ Mbeki also argues that “progressive politics” should look to the European Union for inspiration (Mbeki, 2003: 5).

nationality. The sovereign nation-state is the collective counterpart of the autonomous human person” (Davies, 1996: 471, 479).

This last observation of Davies, about the political implications of the renaissance, is in no small measure due to Machiavelli’s contribution to political science during the renaissance. The originality of Machiavelli (so Berlin argued) was in the recognition that we disagree on fundamental issues, and as a consequence have to make “...agonising choices between incompatible alternatives in public and private life” (Berlin, 1998: 324). Such a vision holds dramatic consequences for policy makers, as Berlin explained:

“If there is only one solution to the puzzle, then the only problems are firstly how to find it, the how to realise it, and finally how to convert others to the solution by persuasion or by force. But if this is not so, then the path is open to empiricism, pluralism, toleration, compromise....those who wished to survive realised that they had to tolerate error. They gradually came to see merits in diversity, and so became sceptical of definitive solutions in human affairs” (Berlin, 1998: 324).

It is incoherent to argue at the same time for progressive politics¹¹, for a renaissance and for the pluralism in human affairs. The last two go together and has been the defining feature of the mainstream economics since Adam Smith (Hayek, 1984). In the renaissance view, as in economics, Africa only exists as a geographical concept; there are neither African values, nor African interests¹².

But rejecting pluralism has, from time to time, led economists to embrace progressive politics. For example, the Physiocrats – who accepted the natural law as opposed to pluralism (Gide and Rist, 1964) – embraced absolutism in their version of progressive politics (Acton, 2000). Neoconservatism likewise, has abandoned pluralism and embraced progressive politics. The close association between the call for progressive politics and the assumption that African unity is obviously desirable¹³ raises

¹¹ Progressive politics is here understood to be centralised whereas decentralised decision-making (such as market decisions) yield pluralistic suggestions. For Mbeki progressive politics is a political response to the question “what is to be done?” after the host of potential political issues had been narrowed to the singular issue, that is: “global poverty constitutes the most challenging structural fault in the contemporary world economy and global human society” (Mbeki, 2003).

¹² The journalist Kapuscinski expressed this realization powerfully in the introduction of his celebrated book *The Shadow of the Sun*: “The continent [Africa] is too large to describe. It is a veritable ocean, a separate planet, a varied, immensely rich cosmos. Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say “Africa”. In reality, except as a geographical appellation, Africa does not exist” (Kapuscinski, 1998).

¹³ The merit of economic and even political unity is sometimes regarded as so obvious that a mere restatement of this political vision is substituted for an argument: For example, Guèye (1998 [1997]) argued from memory:

concern that the African century is (at least conceptually) not very different from the American century.

2. AGAINST INSTRUMENTAL HISTORY

Apart from the economic reasons for being unenthusiastic about the project for an African century, that is to say the dangers of idealism, the project could also be questioned from a historiographical perspective.

The relevance of this detour in historiography is that the African Millennium is not simply a forward-looking project; rather it would first “...recall everything that is good and inspiring in our past...free ourselves from backwardness and subservience”, as was mentioned above,

“The sine qua non condition for the survival of our continent, apart from being a crucial necessity for its renaissance, is also the continent’s greatest challenge: African unity. Let us remember and appreciate..., the simple but relevant motto of Kwame Nkrumah: Africa must unite.

Africa can today be compared to Noah’s ark. All people’s of the continent are in the same boat. They will either disappear together or survive together. Thence the illusion cultivated among the peoples of some countries that they are in a better or less dramatic situation than others is dangerous and even criminal. Not a single African country, regardless of its own geographic and demographic size or economic potential, could on its own reach a genuine and sustainable development on the basis of its own forces, resources and capacities, or even successfully resist the various and subtle attempts at recolonisation which are perpetrated under the guise of globalisation” (Guèye, 1998 [1997]: 262).

and then look to our “revolutionaries ...who will define the morrow that belongs to them in a way that will restore to us our dignity” (Mbeki, 1999 [1998]: xxi). But such a project is awkwardly similar to what Lyotard (1979) called a meta-narrative (or “grand discourse”), that is: “a story of mythic proportions, a story big enough and meaningful enough to pull together philosophy and research and politics and art, relate them to one another, and – above all – give them a unifying sense of direction” (Anderson, 1995: 4).

The post-modern world is precisely one of deep scepticism – or “incredulity” in Lyotard’s (1979) terminology – towards these meta-narratives. The post-modernism attitude to history is not a rejection or a negation, but what Umberto Eco (1995) called an “ironic rethinking” of the past (see also Jencks, 1995). Historicism in all its guises (notably dialectical materialism) is roundly rejected by the post-modern perspective. Relative to Marxist and other meta-narratives the post-modern perspective can be described as a “suspicion of suspicion,” in Kvale’s (1995) terms; or as he explained it at greater length:

“The interest in the surface, in what manifestly appears, is in contrast to a debunking attitude where nothing is what it seems to be. This hermeneutics of suspicion, inherent in so much modern thought, was carried to its extremes in some versions of psychoanalytic and Marxist thought. An action may never be what it appears to be; rather it is an expression of some deeper, more real reality, a symptom of more basic sexual or economic forces. There is a continual hunt for the underlying plan or rationale, the hidden plot or curriculum, to explain the vicissitudes and disorder of what

manifestly appears” (Kvale, 1995: 24).

Postmodernism has (fatally) undermined the project of using history to project a meaningful future and orient the present. “The past is a foreign country;” wrote Hartley (1972) “...they do things differently there.” In this way - Rüsén (1993: 222) argued - history has lost a “portion of its instrumental importance.” The past is no longer a funicular to the future, or a compass for the present.

This perspective is relevant because it contradicts some of the intellectual underpinnings of the African Millennium project and its big idea: the African renaissance. With respect to the latter, for example, former President Mandela’s melancholy recollection of the Punic Wars and the eventual destruction of Carthage at the OAU in June 1994 is the focal point for a meta-narrative of systemic exploitation, the rallying point for the struggle that lies ahead and a vision of the society that is to come¹⁴. This moralistic example is an example of the doctrine that Africa is poor: because Africans are so good and the rest so bad, to paraphrase David Landes¹⁵ (1990). Not that post-modern historians never revisit the Punic wars, on the contrary, but when they do it is “...with irony, not innocently” (Eco, 1995: 32).

¹⁴ During the fourth annual Steve Biko memorial lecture in Cape Town recently, Kenyan author Ngũgĩwa Thiong’o (2003) again used the destruction of Carthage as the focal point as a historical reference “pregnant with meaning and significance” (as Rüsén (1993) would have observed) for the unfolding Africa renaissance.

¹⁵ Of course, some in the developed world hold the opposite view, that they are rich and Africans poor, because they’re so good and Africans so bad (Landes, 1990).

Whereas the meta-narrative of Mandela and Thiong'o is poetic, the meta-narrative sketched by Mbeki (2003) is more recognizably Marxist, as the following few lines confirm:

“Immanent with this, is the recognition and acceptance of the fact that in its functioning and reproduction, capital, as distinct from capitalist, is not informed by any sense of social responsibility. It has no soul. Money and its multiplication constitutes its motive power... ‘the market,’ has its own innate logic, its own objective process of development, which is independent of human consciousness. In this sense, capital dictates the rules that human society sets itself, to ensure that capital is able to reproduce itself... In essence the practitioners within this discipline [Economics] have sought to interpret and predict the behaviour of capital as an objective, material factor in the evolution of human society, as opposed to those factors that are subjective and spiritual” (Mbeki, 2003: 2).

Whether this is crude or very refined materialism is hard to say; one is not sure what the standards are as these things go. Either way the historic role for objective capital in this materialism is a meta-narrative and, as such, at an intellectual discount at this time. This is quite apart from the arguments against Marxism by economists, the most important of which is (presumably) that it has falsified by the experience¹⁶, or as James Buchanan said: “The god that

¹⁶ The important empirical predictions of Marxism (the long term decline in the rate of profit, the increasing severity of economic cycles and the increasing misery of the working class, the impossibility of reforming capitalism) have all been falsified by the events (Popper, 1966; 1997).

was socialism is *demonstrably dead*' (Buchanan, 1999 [1990]: 180, emphasis in the original).

If there is no foundation in history upon which to construct a meta-narrative for this continent, perhaps there is an empirical one? Indeed up till recently a case could be made that African economies were performing inexplicably poorly, that is: in standard empirical growth models, African economies systematically underperformed relative to the model's prediction. Some of the early empirical literature that identified such an "African dummy" included: Barro (1991), Barro and Lee (1994), Sala-i-Martin (1997) and Easterly and Levine (1997).

The existence of such an African dummy is a necessary, though not a sufficient condition for a continent-wide initiative for economic development of coherence. If there really was a negative African dummy, then perhaps one could have argued that the decentralised system is rigged against Africa, and that governments and their leaders – in short progressive politics – need to step in to lead Africans to an alternative non-discriminatory system.

However, the evidence for the African dummy has crumbled under closer scrutiny, both using panel data (for example, du Plessis and Keller, 2004) and in cross section studies (for example, Burger and du Plessis, 2003). Absent empirical evidence for a systematic underperformance by African economies, the case for a shared systematic response by African governments is greatly undermined.

We are left with the sober conclusion of Collier and

Gunning (1999) that Africa's poor economic record can be understood with the framework of empirical growth models complemented with a study of institutions. These important variables in growth models are often low in African countries, and institutions frail or growth debilitating (World Bank, 2002). Sala-i-Martin's recent and very comprehensive empirical research on the causes of disappointing growth by African economies suggested the following as primary causes: military conflict, poor institutions (especially a failure to protect property rights and insufficient rule of law), closed trade regimes, policy distortions that raise the cost of investment, overburdened states, poor human capital formation, unfortunate geography and disease (Sala-i-Martin, 2003).

Economists work with the presumption – based as it is on experience – that decentralised decision-making trumps attempts at central organisation, in terms of both static and dynamic efficiency. This presumption leaves a lot of room for collective action to lower the transaction costs that frustrate specialisation and trade in a decentralised system. Institutions are required to lower the cost of disorder. At the same time the formal rules create authorities with power that threaten the very institutions they are meant to maintain; this is the paradox of power and a powerful demonstration is the melancholy history of money management by discretionary central banks since WWII. This means that there are costs of dictatorship to be weighed over against the costs of disorder (Djankov, Glaeser, La Porta and Shleifer, 2003).

The formal and informal institutions that operate at any

point strike a balance between the costs of disorder and dictatorship. This intricate network of institutions is called the institutional matrix and, though an efficient matrix shows many similar features, there are no blueprints across countries.

Development economists have accepted this conclusion from the New Institutional literature and this has undermined then search for the holy grail of economic growth and development (Easterly, 2001). There are neither policies nor plans - not even at the institutional level – which translate across economies without accommodation for individual exceptions (Easterly, 2003). This realisation undermines the drive for an African Renaissance, if this concept is to have much by way of shared content; at least, at any level less abstract than the much maligned Washington Consensus.

To summarise the argument so far in the paper: firstly, the African millennium is strikingly similar to the idealistic neoconservative project for the American century. Secondly, these neoconservative projects are meta-narratives which are unable to inspire society at a time when we are both cognisant of our differences and protected from tyranny (even patriotic tyranny). Thirdly, there are neither empirical nor institutional reasons for constructing the meta-narrative.

Finally, none of the above guarantees that African leaders will not try to bring about their meta-narrative and historically two directions – one utopian and the other statist - have been the vehicles whereby leaders have tried

to bring about their meta-narratives.

3. CONCLUSION

The argument of this paper is that knowledge of economics should prevent us from pursuing the grand schemes associated variously with the African Renaissance or the African Millennium. This will not stop others, especially not politicians, from pursuing them; for in leadership Say's Law may not entirely be mistaken either, but such pursuits show the mark of a "pretence of knowledge" - to borrow Hayek's (1989 [1974]) phrase - against which economic theory and the experience offer a powerful warning.

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