
Mbiti's Model of Time and Its Implications To African Development: An "Emo-Mechanical" intervention.

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Abstract

This work seeks to examine the implications of Mbiti's Philosophy on African development as a way of tackling the problems of African development through the instrumentality of time. Mbiti's centres his philosophy on time which he sees as the key to African ontology. This paper uses this philosophy to examine the problems of development in Africa as Mbiti sees time as a key to understanding African ontology. This reveals that time has the capacity to reach every aspect of life in Africa as it is essential in explaining the beliefs, practices, attitudes and general way of life of the African people. Time also has overbearing influence in the politics, education, economic and religious aspects of life in Africa and addressing the issues in these areas tantamount to development in the society. Therefore, using the analytic method, this paper discloses the positive and negative implications of Mbiti's philosophy to African development. It observes that if Mbiti's concept of time is the way to comprehend African ontology, it can be used as a mechanism of understanding the problems of development in Africa. It contends that if due attention is given to the study of time in Africa; it has the capacity of tackling the problems of development in the continent. This paper concludes by recommending a model called an "Emo-Mechanical model" which is an African inspired developmental model that involves a strategic blending of African emotionalized time model and the western mechanical

time category for an optimal results. This model of development will address the problems of development in Africa by appropriating the gains of western goal oriented model and at the same time retain African communal and relational values and peculiarities.

Key-words – Time, Mbiti, Time models, Development, interventions, emo-mechanical.

Introduction

Development in all aspects of life in Africa is something that calls for urgent attention. Africa seems to be behind other continents when it comes to development. There are so many challenges facing life in Africa which include but not limited to unemployment, poverty, poor education, poor health care, and poor infrastructure and so on. There are claims and counterclaims that Africa is the cradle of humanity and civilization but these claims on the long are only good for intellectual exercise. It was Louis Farakhan, an African-American who observes according to Onebunne that, “Africans gave civilization to the world and yet parade herself like an international beggar before them,” (Onebunne 2015:114). This of course is seems ironical but it is a reality to be faced. The challenges of development in Africa are multifaceted. For instance, Africa has a complex experience of slavery and slave trade, colonization and exploitation. These experiences contributed immensely to the disfiguring of the socio-political structures and economic systems in Africa.

However, in the foreword to the book written by JohnMark Okafor titled: *Building Servant Leadership for Africa*, Chibueze Ofobuike notes that, “Despite the deposits of natural resources, vast arable lands, favourable climatic conditions, low records of natural disasters, and numerous other environmental and human advantages, African leaders have failed to exploit the available opportunities for the benefit of African countries,” (Okafor 2023: xii). He goes further to state that, “what is obtainable in

different parts of the continent include ethnic and religious conflicts, foreign debts and dependency, stark poverty, acute corruption, unemployment, inequality, etc.” (Okafor 2023: xii). One may wonder why Africa remains underdeveloped amidst so many natural resources she is blessed with. Walter Rodney (1982:10) observes that, “a society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment.” Thus, the uninterrupted economic development visible in the world today is as a result of man’s continual development in skills which enables him to manipulate nature and make living from it. Rodney observes that the human society has experience a lot of progresses historically. The first progress was made from the use of crude stone tools to use of metals. Again, the second stage involves the movement from hunting of wild animals and gathering of wild fruits to the domestication of wild animals and growing of food crops. He notes that the third stage of development in human society is marked by the improvement in the organization of labour from something individualistic to wearing a social look by becoming something that acknowledges the participation of many. It is pertinent to note that for Rodney, development is determined by the ability of the people to express their capacity in making a satisfactory living through the exploitation of the resources of nature and not by the mere deposit of the resources. It is obvious that man’s destiny in the world is nothing but a journey of exploration and exploitation of the resources of nature. His living and development is dependent on the extent he could go in dealing with nature to serve his purpose.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that some communities in Africa do not seem to be gearing towards this line of equipping its members with skills that will help them to master their environment and exploit its resources to improve their standard of living. There is obvious lack of developmental plan or blue print for some communities, at least to get out of these problems bedeviling Africa. What we see is the annual celebration of

festivals like New Yam Festival, *Ofala*, and ceremonies that have been celebrated for more than two thousand years without any intention of designing a map or blue print for future developments. There is no sketch one would say that is driving the activities of some communities towards the advancement of the future. This becomes a problem that its ontology deserves to be examined. This paper sees in Mbiti's model of time the answer to the question of why African leaders are not investing in the critical areas of development. It seeks to unearth this answer by enumerating how this idea of time is engineering underdevelopment in Africa.

Mbiti's Model of Time.

The African concept of time in J. S. Mbiti is the route to understanding African ontology. Mbiti argues that it is pertinent for anyone who wishes to understand the people of Africa and their world to first of all understand their ontology. He maintains that Africans have an ontology which is a religious ontology. To penetrate this ontology, Mbiti sees the African model of time as the key to understanding African ontology. More so, in his exploration of the concept of time in Africa, Mbiti notes that time is of no academic interest to the general people of Africa in their traditional life. According to him, time for the people of Africa "is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur," (Mbiti 1969:17). He goes on to argue that, "what has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of No time," (Mbiti 1969:17). This is to say that what constitutes time in Africa is what has happened or what is happening now or what is likely going to happen soon. Anything that is not likely going to happen soon especially in the order of natural occurrences has no place in the African conception of time. Mbiti moves

further to classify time into potential and actual time in a bid to throw more light to the understanding of time in African cosmology.

Potential time is constituted of the events which are certain to occur; events that fall under the order of natural occurrences. There are events which must occur like rain fall, planting and harvesting, morning and night. These events even though may not be happening at the time but are recognized as part of time because they are likely going to happen in no distant future. Such events are categorized under potential time because their occurrence is a certainty. Mbiti uses the idea of potential time to mark events that are not happening at the moment but are inevitably going to happen. On the other hand, actual time for Mbiti involves events which are presently happening or that which has happened in the past. That is, actual time deals with present and past events. Events which are yet to take place are not under actual time but potential time. Mbiti observes that this time moves backward instead of forward. The people are concerned about what has taken place and not what is yet to take place. In effect, the people are more interested in the past than in the future.

Mbiti does not see the implications of time in comprehending African ontology to be limited to reality in traditional African setting. For him, it extends to modern life in Africa and touches critical areas of life like the economy, politics, education and religion. That is, the concept of time in Mbiti is the lens through which reality as a whole is viewed and apprehended. Following the capacity of time to address issues concerning every aspect of life in Africa, it is pertinent and the central to this work to utilize this capacity of time in examining the problems of development in Africa. It is arguable that development is the most critical of all the problems surrounding life in the continent. It becomes essential to look at the implications of this idea of time on African development as a way of charting a new path for Africa towards development.

Meaning of Development

The term “development” seems to be one of the most common words used in this modern and post-modern era. Kwasi Kutor traces the origin of the word development to Wilfred Benson, a former member of the Secretariat of the International Labour Organization, in his work on economic basis for peace written in 1942. He acknowledges that the word did not achieve relevance then since it was not used by experts in the field of development until it was used by the 33rd President of United States, Truman, in his inaugural speech where he says that, “we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of our underdeveloped areas,” (Kutor 2014:15). He further observes that since then, “development has signified at least one thing: to free from the undignified state called underdevelopment,” (Kutor 2014:15).

More so, he argues that the exact meaning of development in the area of development studies has been surrounded by intense controversy. Irrespective of these controversies, there are enough definitions made by different scholars which capture the meaning of development from their various perspectives. Looking at the work of Todaro and Smith, Kutor (2014:15) asserts that, “the meeting of basic needs (or equivalently, reduction in absolute poverty), the creation of employment opportunities, and the achievement of a less unequal distribution of income have become important criteria in determining the level of development.” He stresses further that development “is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multidimensional processes involving reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social system and it is a process of improving the quality of all human lives...,” (Kutor 2014:16). He notes

that there are three essential aspects as regards to this meaning of development which are sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom. According to him, these are the universal goals being pursued by the society and individual.

Gordon views development from the perspective of achieving beyond the already set up goals. Development in this sense is not something that is accidental or natural. It is something that is intentional, relational and teleological. In his words, "to be developed implies achieving more than an end that ought to be achieved," (Gordon 2006:93). Looking at this assertion by Gordon, Ozoigbo (2016:14) opines that, "what this means is that for development to be in place there must be set targets and achieving beyond these set targets brings about development." For Gordon, there can be no development at all where there is no set up targets. Even achieving the set up goals alone is no development for him. It becomes imperative to achieve more than that which is targeted in order for development to be achieved. However, Walter Rodney believes that development can be seen exclusively from an economic sense even though it is a multi-dimensional reality. In justifying this claim, he argues that, "the type of economy is itself an index of social features," (Rodney 1982:2). For him, every other aspects of development have connection with the economy. As such, he makes it clear that, "a society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature (science), on the extent to which they put their understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organized," (Rodney 1982:3). This entails that the development of any society is dependent on the development of its members especially in areas of knowledge and skills acquisition.

In the same line of thought, Amartya Sen views development from economic point of view. Ozoigbo observes that for Sen, freedom is development. In this regard, he notes that, “according to him the level and quality of freedom people have determines their level of development,” (Ozoigbo 2016:14). As such, Kutor (2014:16) maintains that, “all individuals are gifted with certain set of capabilities while it is simply a matter of realizing these capabilities that will allow a person to escape from poverty and their state of unfreedom. The un-freedom comprises lack of education, illiteracy, poor health, malnutrition, etc.” It is important to note that freedom is an important aspect of development and it is only possible where there is education and realization of individuals’ potentials. There can be no freedom and development where there is no education and maximum utilization of the people’s potentials and gifts.

In sum, it is clear that development involves advancement or progress in all aspects of individual and social life. It does not mean westernization in the sense that one does not need to abandon his life for the life of others in order to experience what is known as development. Rather, it involves growth in one’s way of life. With this in mind, it is important to note that African development entails holistic progress in the standard of living of the African people. It is quite unfortunate that this has been a nightmare in African cosmology. Instead of people to experience this continuous growth in their affairs as obtainable in some continents of the world, they experience more difficulty as time goes by. This condition for decades seems to defile political solutions as change in government remains constant with each government coming with their ingenuous ideas. Rodney and Onebunne see the cause of this continuous underdevelopment in Africa in the exploitation of Africa by the Europeans. For Kanu, the cause of the African underdevelopment is the Africans who not only invest most of their time in discussing past events, but also use corruption as a tool for private enrichment and public impoverishment. Evidently, the

causes of African underdevelopment consist in both the consequences of heartless exploitation of Africa by their western oppressors and the obvious corruption in the vein and arteries of the African institutions.

Implications of Mbiti's Idea of Time on African Development

It is arguable that Mbiti's concept of time has implications in every aspects of African life because according to Mbiti himself, it is the key to assessing African ontology and it helps in explaining beliefs, practices, attitudes and general way of life of the African people. This for Nnajiolor (2021:164) reveals that, "time is the lens by which other realities are ascertained and apprehended. Time is the currency with which all other realities are bought and a debt which we all owe and should pay." However, this expresses the importance of time as a tool in understanding reality in African worldview. Mbiti maintains that the effectiveness of this tool of time in explaining reality in African world is not limited to traditional setting; it applies also to modern setting. At this point, it becomes clear in the light of Mbiti, that time can be used to explain politics, economy, education and religion in African cosmology. It is obvious that these subjects; politics, economy, education and religion have incriminating relationship with development. That is, development cannot be discussed anywhere around the world without eyes on politics, economy, education and religion. They are necessary aspects of development. Again, development seems to be one of the most desired conditions in Africa. Thus, this chapter seeks to unveil the connection between Mbiti's concept of time and development in Africa as a way of understanding the contributions of this idea of time on where Africa is today in the scheme of affairs.

Health Preservation

Mbiti argues that time in Africa can be created as much as one wants. For him, man in traditional African society is not a slave to time as opposed to

the condition of man in western technological societies where people live under the dictates of time. In Africa according to Mbiti, time is not in control of man but under the control of man. Nnaji for observes that the people of Africa take their time to do whatever they are doing without need to be in haste to meet-up with schedules. According to him, what matters to an African man is what he is doing at the moment. He has to round it up thoroughly before attending to any other schedule. This reveals that Africans are not faced with the pressure of meeting up with schedules and deadlines which are capable of instigating mental stress and other health challenges. Africans focus on the present events and live in the moment by caring for what matters to them most at that time. They are not psychologically distressed with the thoughts of the future occurrences with the ambition to fight for the future.

It is also obvious that Africans in the light of Mbiti's concept of time are not so much distressed by what the future brings and resultant accumulation to guarantee them. This results in them waiting for the future to come to them. This shows that Africans are in charge of their lives and are not living to meet up with any already designed expectation. Existentially, Africans are living authentic existence by living according to their own pace of life. This is why Nnaji for (2016:273) notes that, "Life and things happen at much slower pace in Africa than in Europe. People prioritize their time based on what they perceived to be most important at that time. Africans spend most of their morning gardening or farming, they show up to the meeting when they have finished their works in the field or take time to finish their meals regardless of their commitment at that time." This mentality of living in the moment, tackling present situations and advancing relationship with people around them instead of spending most of their time and energy in thinking on things that are far away in the distant future saves them from the anxiety and physical stress that surround life that is being lived under strict schedules

and deadlines. This of course allows them to live in good mental and physical states that are devoid of stress and pressures and as such preserve their health in good condition.

2. Freedom from Hazards of Development

Mbiti's concept of time can also be implied in the approach of the people of Africa towards development. Africans as Mbiti observes do not strive to build castles in the air. In other words, they are not expecting a world different from the one they have in the past and enjoying in the present. The idea of a golden age or perfect society where every sufferings of man would be wiped out is far from them. They are only expecting the same society as they have in the past and present. This discloses that the people of Africa are not pursuing development from the ideological perspective, in the sense that their reactions to reality are dependent on how it presents itself to them. That is, they solve the problems of life bit by bit without attempting to create what is not there as observable in western technological world where machines are created out of wide imagination of man to build castles in the air. The western world has it in their conception that a perfect world is possible and as such they are striving to create a perfect society for themselves and their children. This could be seen in their understanding of heaven and their efforts to live in such abode marked with happiness and joy and devoid of any human sufferings and shortcomings. The idea of overcoming this world filled with troubles and dissatisfactions necessitated the messianic hope in Judeo-Christian mentality which does not make sense to Africans in their traditional sense according to Mbiti.

It is obvious that the attempt to create a world different from the past results to some dangers humanity is exposed to today in the bid to achieve development which ranges from natural disasters caused by deforestation, use of some heavy chemicals, mining, and so on. Some technologies as

obtainable in today's world even though they are created to solve mediate and immediate problems most often pose a great threat to human life and the environment. Africans as people who live according to their own pace avoid thwarting nature in such a way that its adverse effects are disastrous to both human life and the environment. Magdy (2020:258) argues that, "Africans can never bear a world open towards an unknown restless future, promising a continuously changing vague progress." They are interested in a world that is secured from the unknown results of progress and preserved in moral perfection of the past. In such case, one can say that Mbiti's concept of time has as one of its implications, the ability to preserve Africans from the dangers of wild and uncontrollable development visible in the western technological world.

3. Preservation of Traditions and Cultural Values:

The idea that Africans are zamanic, modeling their lives according to and towards their past has an implication on their goal of preserving their traditions and cultural values. Firstly, it is pertinent to note that African society is communal in Mbiti's view. He describes this communalism thus; "the individual owes his existence to other people, he is simply part of the whole, whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual, the individual can only say "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am," this is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man," (Mbiti, 1969:108). Magdy (2020:254) contends that, "communalism puts the interest of the stability and the welfare of community as the ultimate end and the highest good for politics. The protection of the communal values as inherited from generation to generation is a must." It becomes obvious that Africans are communalistic and their vision is to preserve this communal society they inherited from their ancestors. This is in line with Mbiti's position that the people of

Africa looks forward not to the future but to the past from where they give explanation of things that happened in the past and things happening in the present and things that would happen in the nearby future. It is important to note that the past in Mbiti's view serves as the model for the present and the future. He maintains that Africans are not expecting in their future anything different from their past. This shows that Africans project only what they have experienced in the past to the future. They are not projecting to the future what is not part of their past. With this it is easier to understand that African society according to Mbiti is not exposed to unknown changes. It is expected to mirror the past and be a replica of the past such that what is expected in the future is what is approved in the past. There is no room for unnecessary and spontaneous changes in the society of the African people.

However, it is pertinent to note that this approach to life helps in preservation of African traditions and cultural values. African society guided by African time is devoid of some immoral dispositions as seen today. It is devoid of those things which lack the approval of the past as the determiner of the present and the future. It is opposed to the western situation where people wake up to behold new things and ways of doing things. However, Africans value their traditional ways of doing things and their cultural values to the point that they wish their future to remain like their past. Magdy (2020:257) opines that, "it is important to understand the African concept of time within African communalism, not modern thinking. The African longs for and is oriented towards the past, not as a simple nostalgia, but because the past symbolizes the perfection and the values of the ideal ancestry and offers the relief from history imperfections." This entails that the past is where perfection lies in African worldview. It is the reference point for everything that is good and worthy of emulation. As such, the people of Africa never wished to be separated from their past since it is the origin and summit of their existence.

In this Eastern part of Nigeria, once you want to do something the way that is not familiar to the people, they will caution you that this is not how it is done even from the days of their forefathers and warn you to be ready for any negative consequences for trying to do things in the way that is not known to the forefathers. The central focus of everything is in preserving the values of the past which seems to give them security and peace of mind. At least, doing something the way it has always been done saves one from error or unknown outcome. To this regard, Magdy (2020:258) avers that, “the African is oriented and longs for an ideal, that is perfect, and “already there,” where he finds his serenity and peace.” It is obvious that this concept of time is capable of preserving the traditions and cultural values of the African people such that perversions and immoralities that are prevalent in today’s African world would have been no where around the continent.

4. Political Dislocation

It is arguable that one of the problems in Africa today is political dislocation. Some scholars find the reason for this political dislocation of Africa in the imposition of modern capitalist state on Africa against its cultural background of communalism. Crawford Young finds the reason of this political crisis in Africa in the religious, racial, ethnic divides and poor governance in the continent. Mahmood Mamdani sees the cause in the imposition of colonial institutions on Africa. He believes that this colonial institutions in Africa brings about divide and rule policy that rules the urban dwellers differently from the rural dwellers. According to him, urban areas which are former residence of the colonial staffs are ruled diligently and the dwellers treated as citizens with law. This is quite different from what is obtainable in rural areas where the natives dwell. The natives in the rural areas are ruled with customs and force instead of

law. This divides and rule policy for him is the reason behind the political crisis in Africa states.

However, Bertrand Badie contends that, “the state structure operating in Africa was imported and in this process of importation, imposition and operation it lost its meaning.” In the same line of thought, Basil Davidson makes it clear that this imported nation state in Africa inherently comes with a curse that is plaguing the Africans in their situation. These scholars see the genesis of the problem in the colonialists’ approach in Africa which turns African subjects to mere objects which eventually results in the imposition of western political structure on Africa with different cultural structure. It is arguable here that the problem is in the mismatch of the structure and culture. No wonder Magdy (2020:260) opines that, “the problem is the unsuitability of structure to culture, not of culture to structure because at the end of the day the structure is the dress not the tailor.”

Moreover, this Egyptian scholar, Ramy Magdy discloses that these African scholars did not attempt to study politics in Africa from the perspective of the Africans, that is, trying to understand politics from the world view of Africans. He looks at politics from Arabic etymology, *siyasa* which is from the root word *Sasa* that means “to lead someone or some people.” He notes that his reason for choosing Arabic word to explain politics instead of English is that it is one of the widely spread “traditional” languages in the continent. Also, it is not so much influenced or affected by colonialism like some other traditional languages in Africa. This for him makes the Arabic language a “reservoir” of experiences in Africa. Magdy (2020:261) argues that, “politics implies a relation of leadership in which someone is leading others.” He insists that this understanding of politics is what is called authority in the contemporary theory of politics. Authority for him has two parts which are command and obedience. So in politics there must be leader who is to command and a

follower who is to obey the command. He argues that, “for the one who obeys to obey he must believe that in his obedience lies his good/interest or, in worst cases, lies his safety. People obey their rulers because in their obedience they expect some good, some interest and some protection from threats or from the wrath of their ruler” (Magdy 2020:250).

More importantly, Magdy (2020:250) observes that, “disobedience or lack of cooperation on the part of the subjects might be caused by disagreement on the rules of the game, the absence of a suitable return for obedience, the failure to achieve the goal of the authority relationship or simply the disagreement on the definitions of these goals, which is difference in perceptions.” With this background, it would be easy to comprehend the core reason for political crisis in Africa. It has been stated that Africans are communalistic in nature and thus Magdy (2020:250) opines that, “communalism is the orientation Africans take in their relations with each other,” and for Mbiti (1969:108), communalism implies that, “the individual does not exist and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group.” Mbiti (1969:108) goes on to assert that, “whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.’ This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.” Magdy (2020:252) contends that, “communalism puts the interest of the stability and the welfare of community as the ultimate end and the highest good for politics. The protection of the communal values as inherited from generation to generation is a must.” Communalism however focuses on ensuring the survival and welfare of the community and also in preservation of the values inherited from the past generation.

Magdy observes that the value of the individual is high when he is standing for the group and less when he is standing for himself. This is to say that the individual worth more while in the company of his fellow men and worth less while in isolation. As such, Magdy notes that anything that seems to violate this communalistic principle is rejected and condemned as a threat to the collective existence of the people.

It is pertinent to note that according to Mbiti, history in African worldview moves backward. Perfection for him lies not in the future but in the past, in the *zamani*. It is arguable that the model of communalism which is the authentic political system for the Africans lies in the past. Thus, Africans look backward in the world of ancestors for eternity and perfection and not forward. As such, Magdy (2020:257) states that, “the African longs for and is oriented towards the past, not as a simple crude nostalgia, but because the past symbolizes the perfection and the values of the ideal ancestry and offers the relief from history imperfections.” He maintains that, “by persistently following and restoring the values of ancestry, that is communalism, Africans seek shelter from the vagaries of the profane time to find security and peace of mind,” (Magdy 2020:257) Since perfection lies in the past for the Africans, it is clear that becoming modern with western concepts and ideologies is something different from what Africans used to be. In modernity, one pursues a future that is not certain which is so open to be anything. This future has no clear image of what it is like and for Magdy, Africans try to escape from such situation where their peace of mind is not assured. In his word, “the African is oriented and longs for an ideal, that is, perfect and “already there,” where he finds his serenity and peace. Africans can never bear a world open towards an unknown restless future, promising continuously changing vague progress,” (Magdy 2020:257).

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the modern state imposed on Africa by colonial rulers is futuristic. The ideal in the modern state lays in the future

progress being pursued by the state-structure as its targets. This is quite different from the ideal in African worldview. It becomes clear that the political crisis in Africa is rooted in forceful coexistence of these opposing worldviews in the post-independence political structure in Africa. Magdy (2020:260) observes that, “as the modern state is structurally oriented towards the future, while the African is conceptually oriented towards the past (Zamani), the modern state could not convince African elites to abide because seeking merely the future gives no relief.” This explains the ontology of the crisis in political atmosphere in Africa. Since the goal of the modern state does not align with the goal of African subjects, conflict, corruption and resistance to authority become inevitable. African subjects find it difficult to forfeit the loyalty to their ethnic groups for some promise of unclear future progress. Since their mentality has been configured to protect their group’s interest and save it from the pains of the present situation, African elites use every opportunity they find in modern state to pursue this interest of ethnic loyalty and protection from the insecurities of the present (Sasa) like poverty, hunger and pains at the expense of other ethnic groups in the state which triggers unending conflicts in the African political atmosphere. Every ethnic group would want its collective interest to be protected at the expense of other ethnic interests.

In a nut shell, the problem simply lies in African disbelief in the future progress pursued by the modern state. Each ethnic group has its ideal in the past, in the world of their ancestors and this ideal is peculiar to each group and not generic to all tribes in Africa. No group will be willing to forgo its zamani for another group’s own. The sense that the modern state is the large community is yet to be accepted completely. If the African subjects are pursuing an ideal that is in the past and the modern state is pursuing an ideal that is in the future, it explains reason why Africa is still scrambling for development. It is clear that development is far from where there are conflicting ideas and goals and Africa is a good example of such

a place where diversity in ideas especially between the citizens and the state is yielding retrogression instead of progression. Loyalty to the state in Africa is weakling possibly because of this difference in ideology which breeds disbelief in the state and results in corruption and resistance to authority. Those in authority use the state as a means to foster the zamani of their ethnic group and other citizens from other ethnic put their best effort in resisting it and at the end the state is run in chaos and disbelief. In this regard Magdy (2020:261) submits that, “the conflict in Africa is caused, among many things, by the discrepancy between the African political temporality and western modern state temporality. The modern state, by its futuristic, individualistic orientation, failed to suit the African communalist Zamanic (past) orientation. ... As Africans are Zamani (past) oriented, they will not restrain their behaviours for any futuristic promises cut from their Zamanic communalist vision.” It is clear that where there is such incompatibility between the mindset of the people and the goals of the state, development will remain elusive.

4. Lack of Vision

It is obvious that another implication of Mbiti's concept of time on African development is in the absence of commitment towards pursuing a future course that will bring about a world that is different from the present one, especially one that is devoid of present predicaments plaguing life in Africa. It is arguable that things become worse in Africa especially as time goes by. Previous administrations always seem to be better than the subsequent ones. This shows that development in Africa is retrogressive instead of progressive and that is what Rodney calls “Underdevelopment.” The reason is there in Mbiti's understanding of time in African cosmology. According to him, “African peoples have no ‘belief in progress,’ the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor

‘build castles in the air,’” (Mbiti1969:23). Their mind is oriented to the past, the *zamani* that they are often occupied with the things that have happened rather than with the things that will happen and prevent the negative ones from happening. In order to buttress this point, Anthony Kanu (2015:130) contends that, “a cursory glance at Mbiti’s African idea of time as backward very much explains why Africans are more concerned with how Europe underdeveloped Africa than with how they are themselves destroying the future of Africa through corruption. We are often more concerned with a history that has passed than with a future that is full of opportunities.”

Arguably, the blame game is still on in Africa where it is enough reason to explain away poverty in the continent by simply pointing at colonialism as the cause of the poverty that has ravaged the region for decades now without any strategy on ground to alleviate the people’s suffering. To attest to the reality of this blame tactics in African politics, Reza Suleiman (2016:323) observes that, “many African leaders have pointed to colonial exploitation as the direct *raison d’être* for the continents rearward. Colonial rule prevented normal socio-economic development in Africa because the Europeans regarded African economy as an appendage of their economy. That Europeans demoralized the continent by taking slaves, profits, and raw materials out of the continent and leaving nothing in return.” To solidify his point, he quotes President Ahmed Sekou of Guinea who notes that, “the relation between the degree of destitution of peoples of Africa and the length and nature of the exploitation they had to endure is evident. Africa remains marked by the crimes of the slave-traders: up to now, her potentialities are restricted by under population,” (Suleiman 2016:323). While it is true that colonialism contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa, after all, a Latin American Economist, Andre Gunder Frank as quoted by Suleiman submits that, “development at one end leads to underdevelopment in the other end,” which is as a result of

the nature of relationship that exists between the developed and the developing nations, that is, as the relationship is leading to more development in developed nations, it is leading to underdevelopment in the developing countries, Nnajiolor (2016:254) points out that, “the general observation is that most African nations lack the foresight to institute enduring economic programs; hence the continuous cycles of poverty, bad government, monumental backwardness and seemingly perpetual over-dependence on other peoples of the world for minimal survival.” From the foregoing, it obvious that what colonialism bequeaths Africa is nothing but economic hazard which is sustained through devastating imperialistic relationship between Africa and the West which is maintained till today. One may be perturbed to ask, since the nature of the relationship between African countries and western nations is the cause of the underdevelopment that is plaguing the continent, what is the way out of this kind of relationship? Walter Rodney (1982) insists that, “African development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system which has been the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries.” In the same line of thought, Suleiman (2016:323) argues that in the view of African leaders, “the only way Africa can advance is to terminate this imperialistic administration.” It seems the vision is not there drawing from the efforts on ground, not on papers because Africans lay more emphasis on the past than on the future. As such, Kanu (2015:131) submits that, “if the greatest emphasis of the African is on the past rather than the future, and if on the future at all, on the immediate future, it means that the vision that Africans have for themselves cannot but be limited. And obviously, where there is no vision, there is no development.” Thus, Mbiti’s concept of time reveals that Africa view of reality is shortsighted which results to poor planning and as such to underdevelopment as noticeable in the continent.

5. Poor Time Management

It is obvious that Africans are known for their unserious attitude to time. Some scholars of African philosophy acknowledge this view that the people of Africa are not time conscious. Nnajiolor (2016:253) refers to this as lack of “time discipline.” According to him, “Africans have the tendency to relax, indifferent attitude towards time, and [not] starting events or arriving at events at their scheduled time. There is this acceptance that nothing will start at the absolute time indicated on the schedule.” This attitude is not peculiar to one nation in Africa; it is a general problem in Africa. It affects the people’s attitude to work. Thus, he further discloses that, “this general laxity of Africans about time, especially future time, pervades African people and nation’s collective attitude to work. It manifests in politics and economy, as in other aspects of national life in almost all countries on the continent,” (Nnajiolor 2016:254).

Arguably, this poor attitude to time contributes to the developmental problems in Africa. Laxity in time management affects productivity. Every day and every time of the day should have its target where development is the goal. After all, Gordon makes it clear that development is simply achieving beyond the set targets. That is, for development to be attained there must be set targets and achieving beyond these targets ushers in development. However, where there is laxity in time management, it will be impossible to meet up with the set targets not to talk of achieving more in order to meet development which lies in achieving more. Nnajiolor (2016:268) observes that the tag already on Africans indicates that, “...laxity in time management is one of the highest contributors to productivity loses in the work place and personal life as plans are not well executed per time.” Kanu (2015:131) observes that, “in many government owned ministries, many Africans who should be working in their offices during working hours are seen sitting under the

tree discussing.” He also points out on how this problem has eaten deep into the bone marrow of Africa such that even in schools, some students go to school and leave before the appropriate time for dismissal. For him, this is a problem that lingers around Africa and its outcome is devastating especially in hampering development.

Ghanaian Chronicle according to Kanu (2015:131) states that, “the problem of punctuality has become so endemic that lateness to any function is accepted and explained off as ‘African time’.” In looking at the extent of the situation, he goes on to assert that:

the situation has become so bad that in October 2007, Wikipedia (2013) reported that how an Ivorian campaign against African time, backed by President Laurent Gbagbo, received international media attention when an event called “Punctuality Night” was held in Abidjan to recognize business people and government workers for regularly being on time. The slogan of the campaign was “‘African time’ is killing Africa- lets fight it.” With this, the organizers hoped to heighten awareness of how missed appointments, meetings or even late buses cut productivity in a region where languid tardiness is the norm. It was remarked that the 2007 winner, a legal adviser by name Narcisse Aka, who received a \$60,000 villa in recognition of his punctuality was so good with time that his colleagues call him ‘Mr White Man’s Time’, (Kanu 2015:131).

Summarily, it is crystal clear that the nonchalant attitude to time seen in Africa is among the things hampering development in the continent. It is no longer a fairy tale that Africans are not time conscious. It is seen everywhere and always in every corner of the continent. This is an implication of Mbiti’s (1969:19) view that, “man is not a slave of time; instead he makes as much time as he wants.” This for him, shows that Africans are not wasting time even when they are seen sitting down, practically doing nothing because they are not subject to time. It is not a case that one did not meet up with time, he can create as many time as

possible. Nevertheless, it is arguable that development is timely. Where such attitude to time is the order, development is unachievable. Thus, Kanu (2015:131) opines that, “the direct consequence of this attitude towards time is Africa’s underdevelopment.” Laxity cannot engender development but underdevelopment. For development to be achievable, people’s attitude to time must change to one that prioritizes the schedule and deadlines.

6. Myopic Investments

It was the Governor of Anambra State of Nigeria, Prof Chukwuma Charles Soludo who observes in his Second Anniversary Speech on 17th of March, 2024, that politicians in Africa think always about the next election and not next generation. This has resulted to the execution of low quality infrastructures and enticing policies that are meant to serve momentarily as a way of pleasing the electorates who are not also conscious of the durability of the projects and policies to vote them again in the next election. Obviously, this constitutes to the infrastructural decay and underdevelopment seen in different parts of Africa. Money that should be used for two kilometers of road will be used on ten kilometers of road and more money will be used to maintain those roads in the nearest future at the time money should be invested in other areas of development. Often, it seems that the government and its people are just living in the moment. There are no eyes on the distant future.

It is also observable that Politicians in Africa do not invest in long term projects like power, functional education, other areas of human capital development, pulling people out of poverty, industrialization and so on simply because the result of such investment is not immediate and the glory maybe taking by the subsequent administration. It is arguable that the people of Africa do not belief in the distant future if they only invest in things that have immediate results. When government and its people

invest in projects that have little or no contributions to make in the betterment of the future, such investment is myopic. It involves investment in subsidy, palliative, birthdays, funerals, cars, religious and health tourisms as evident in some states in Africa. Kanu (2017:26) notes that, “it is in Nigeria that you find a situation where people have no work, salaries have not been paid, and yet billions of naira are spent on pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia and Jerusalem.” They appeal to the now and look away from the future. However, it is notable that development is not a short-term project, after all, Havinden sees it as a sustained rise in the country’s standard of living as perceived and assessed by the majority of its citizens.

However, long term projects come with vision and creativity. If the African people have a vision of the kind of future they want for their children and children’s children, they will invest in long-term projects that can bring such vision to materialization. Investment in explorations and researches is an investment in building or concretizing an envisioned future. It is obvious that there can be no development where there is no vision and one of the key ways to create and actualize such vision is by investing in researches and explorations which are arguably not the case in Africa. It is arguably that building a prosperous and livable state prompts the Europeans to engage in the exploration that eventually turns to exploitation and colonialism and as such, they used the resources found in other nations to build castles for their generations to come and leaves poverty in those nations. One can attribute it to be the product of vision and investment in long-term projects regardless of the fact that colonialism is evil but whether good or bad, it can only be engendered through vision.

7. Religious Over-Dependency

Mbiti remarks that the discovery of western dimension of future time is responsible for the laxity Africans exhibit towards life especially when it

comes to facing challenges of life. He opines that the promise of paradise taught by Christian Missionaries breeds expectation of the millennium in the people. According to Mbiti (1969:28), “this makes many Christians escape from facing the challenges of this life into the state of merely hoping and waiting for the life of paradise.” Some people instead of working hard to defeat the challenges facing them, they will prefer to avoid the challenges and expect a perfect life of paradise which is promised at the end of time. It is once observed that some people sold their property in Africa when one man of God announced the date for the end of time. Some people stop working and engage in selling and squandering what they have as a way of preparing themselves for the world to come where suffering will be invisible. Mbiti observes that Africans do not have such conception of time in their cosmology. Thus, the reason for complete misunderstanding of the Christian eschatology as was taught by Christian Missionaries.

More so, Mbiti argues that this expectation of the paradise brings about the creation of more independent churches that are centered on individuals that stand or see themselves as the gateway towards actualizing this great expectation of paradise. It is pertinent to note that this expectation has grown in today’s African world as many Christians now see miracle as the essence or central message of Christianity. People use their precious time in moving from one prayer house to another in the search of miracle that can transform his or her life which they believe will come with the already predetermined time for their blessings by God. To attest to this reality, Kanu states (2017:26) that, “it is in Nigeria that men and women keep away from work, waiting in idleness for God’s blessings; hours upon hours that should be spent in work are spent in churches and mosques.” Such attitude results in loss of productivity because the time and energy that should be channeled towards productive use which will in turn contribute to the general development of the society is used in search of miracle that

is practically nowhere. Anyway, Kanu observes that some men of God are portraying God as one who rewards mediocrity and laziness by giving a competitive job to one who is unqualified through fasting and prayers. This over-reliance in religious solution to problems of poverty and health is a serious impediment to development in Africa. One can say that it is a shift from the productive mentality of the people to unproductive mentality that is foreign and hazardous to development. This is seen in the uncontrollable growth in the number of churches with drastic reduction in the number of people willing to work and unmatched to the number of industries available. At this point, it can be said that human efforts are being sacrificed on the altar of divine intervention and expectation of the messiah who will come to deliver the people from all sufferings which are consequences of their sins in due time. This mentality moreover is inimical to development.

Urgent need for an “Emo-Mechanical” Intervention:

Having seen the strengths and weaknesses of Mbiti's concept of time especially as it implies to African development, it is pertinent to propose a model that will incorporate these strengths and do away with the weaknesses. Emo-Mechanical model is here to bridge the gap between the western linear time and African time. This name is derived from the mechanical nature of western time and the emotional nature of Mbiti's idea of time. In Western cosmology, there is a time system that is linear and mechanical. It is measured using a mechanical tool like clock. It is straightforward moving from past, present to future. In this system, people prioritize their schedules and try to meet-up with deadlines at the expense of every other thing including their relationships. In Africa, the opposite is the case. Nnajiolor observes that African people spend their time well in anything they are doing at the moment before thinking of any other thing ahead. In this system, time is cyclical and not linear or mechanical. It

values things around without worrying about things in the distant future. Thus, Nnajofofor goes further to argue in line with Mbiti that Africans prefer to spend more time in fostering relationships than in attending to urgent schedule. According to him, “the Igwebuike (strength in unity) ideology still holds sway in the consciousness of the African people, which is why they can sacrifice their time at the altar of communal relationships,” (Nnajofofor 2023:56). This shows that African time is relaxed and focuses on fostering human relationships as that is what matters most to Africans in their cosmology.

However, looking at the weaknesses of this time system which manifest mostly in lack of vision and pursuit for future progress, it is imperative to adopt western time system that is futuristic, mechanical and progressive to fill the deficiencies of Mbiti’s concept of time especially in fostering development in Africa. The blending of these two time systems, western and Mbitian, culminates in Emo-Mechanical model which is expected to drive African development. This model contains some part of Western mechanical time and some part of African time as a way of generating development that is African for Africans. This model contains the African peculiarities especially when it comes to fostering relationships with fellow humans, preservation of health and cultural and traditional values. It contains also the futuristic, mechanistic and progressive aspects of western time where future and not the present and the past are prioritized. This model of development, although it contains western ideology, retains its Africanity and as such, it has the capacity to bring development to the people of Africa without disposing their African identity like other theories of development such as modernization and dependency theories. It brings Africans to a common ground where relationships with their fellow human beings are encouraged, freedom from mental and other health challenges as a consequent of life lived under strict schedules and deadlines is promoted as individuals are not encouraged to avoid

circumstances that come their way as they try to meet-up with schedules and deadlines without being too late. One who has appointment by 10:00am but has a visitor who needs his help around 9:45am should not abandon his visitor in favour of meeting up with scheduled appointment. Also, he should not relax with his visitor that he lost his appointment but should marry the two as the tenet of this Emo-Mechanical model propels. In this case, he should give something like thirty minutes to his visitor and tries to meet-up with the scheduled appointment at most by 10:30am. This model will give Africans the opportunity to develop at their own relative pace without being left behind by other peoples and cultures of the world. It is obvious that Africans do not value development that has no human face. Achievements are made to be enjoyed with friends and relatives. Whatever is in the world is meant for humans including time and not humans for them. In this vein, Kanu discloses that even god exists for humans and not humans for god in African cosmology. Thus, one can choose to attend a meeting late in order to receive and give attention to his needy neighbour. Moreover, Nnajiolor (2023:56) maintains that, “the pleasantries and fellowships involved while attending to visitors in Africa are terribly time gulping and intensive. This is unlike in the western space where special appointments are scheduled for visitors.” It helps the West to have enough time to invest in their businesses and other activities that would give them a better future at the expense of relationships and pleasantries. Nevertheless, Africans prefer to invest more time in attending to their visitors, friends and family members than in thinking about the future and its possible promises. Nnajiolor (2023:57) goes further to state that, “the spontaneity and “emotionalization” of visits are rampant in Africa. This is because; no special appointment is required from an African to visit a relation or neighbour and no rendezvous is required for him to join a meal he is privileged to meet.” It is clear that for any

development to be African it must share this relationship sentiment in order to represent the aspirations of the African people.

Therefore, for development to be true, it must represent the aspirations of the people. It is evident that Africans are communalistic and their aspirations for development cannot be separated from their communalistic nature. Also, the perpetuation of this communalistic nature without innovative improvement in the standard of living of the people is no development. No matter how one wants to see it, development cannot be actualized where there is no vision and planning for a better and more sufficing society. To this effect, Emo-Mechanical model is proposed as a model of development generated from the blending of Mbiti's concept of time with western linear time to give Africans progressive mindset without stripping them that hospitality and other cultural values that are one with their being. This model will take Africans to a world that never were in their cosmology without separating them from the world that were from the onset of their existence by giving them foresight to create a better future without denying them the back sight of their origin and support which is concretized in their communalism.

Evaluation and Conclusion

It is obvious that the implications of Mbiti's concept of time on African development are two sides to a coin. It has both positive and negative aspects. In its positive aspects, it involves the preservation of health of the African people by saving them from stress and pressures that surround life in a system where one must live under strict schedules and deadlines. Also, it is capable of granting them freedom from the dangers that come with wide and parallel development. It gives them the mindset of valuing relationship with fellow humans at the expense of any other thing in the world. Nevertheless, the implications of Mbiti's concept of time on

African development are seen more from a perspective where it seems to be real when it comes to impeding development in the continent. Having seen its influence in the political instability in the continent, people's poor attitude to time, lack of vision, myopic investment, and religious over-dependency, it is arguable that Mbiti's concept of time has overpowering influence on African development, whether positive or negative. It reveals that people's understanding of time determines their approach to reality. This shows the unavoidable relationship between African concept of time and development. It discloses that development is dependent on the concept of time such that where time is not properly conceived and managed, development becomes unrealizable. Having seen how Mbiti's concept of time exposes its own contributions for African underdevelopment, it is necessary to marry it with the western concept of time which is linear, mechanistic and futuristic. It prioritizes future dimension of time more than the present and the past dimensions that characterize African concept of time according to Mbiti. However, with this Emo-Mechanical model, Africans will be exposed to a system that incorporates western futuristic, mechanistic and linear system of time without losing their African values and other peculiarities. That is, Emo-Mechanical model bridges the gap between Mbiti's concept of time and Western concept of time by marrying their strengths and disposing their weaknesses. With this model, Africans will have access to development that is one with their being. Therefore, there is need moreover for Time Education to be encoded in basic academic curriculum in Africa as a way of reorienting the African prodigies on this model of time which is capable of changing the African mentality and approach to reality and in turn engender development in the continent both at individual and societal levels.

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