

African Indigenization Of Tardiness And Underdevelopment

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Abstract

The problem of development of Africa seems to be recurrent in academic research. Most often, it is analyzed from the standpoint of underdevelopment. Underdevelopment in this sense is understood to be factors that have retarded the development of Africa following the pangs of colonization. Unfortunately, what is termed underdevelopment is actually a product of internal factors and the African belief system. One of such beliefs is the African way of telling time. We shall undertake a philosophical view of the African conception of time in order to understand how it affects development in Africa. We shall therefore recommend a reconsideration of attitudes to time by the Africans to bring about a sustainable continental development.

Keywords: Indigenization, development, underdevelopment, Africanization, African time

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Africa is one of the continents named as ‘underdeveloped’ in the world and often tagged “third world”; a less blunt expression for the poor, helpless, exploitable, nations of the world. Even many years after political independence from colonial masters, Africa is still saddled with the problem of self-development. Hunger, disease, mental and material poverty, unemployment, injustice, insecurity, exploitation, ethnic rivalries, pride, victimization, etc. characterize an average African life.

Given the precarious condition of the nation, one is left with great rumination and questioning. Thus, a curious mind may ask, “Why is there no remarkable improvement in our practical situations, or socio-political ideologies, economic policies, religious freedom and social structure in Africa since after the western occupation? A spontaneous response to this question would point to corruption, moral profligacy, financial misappropriation, squander mania, kidnapping, assassination et cetera. The avalanche of these ills presupposes some more subtle factors. These factors are latent in the African belief system and outlook to life. For instance, most acts of tardiness are often explained off as “African time”. This romanticized attitude to time is a ubiquitous cog in the wheel of African development.

To effectively carry out a study on how this African way of perceiving time has influenced development in the nation, the methods of exposition, analysis and criticism will be used. Recommendations and conclusion will be subsequently carried out.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS .

2.1 INDIGENIZATION

Indigenization is the art of making something more native or transforming something to suit a particular local culture. It is a term that is primarily used by anthropologists in describing what happens when locals take something from outside and make it their own(Wikipedia.org). Hence, “Africanization” is the best term to be substituted for indigenization in the context of this work. This will explain unambiguously what the African do (which is ‘indigenization’) in referring to tardiness as “African time”.

2.2 UNDERDEVELOPMENT

The phenomenon of underdevelopment cannot be understood independent of comparison of levels of development. It portrays the reality of unevenness in human social development where some groups advance further than others by becoming more wealthy. It implies a state of unsatisfactory societal well-being compared to existent conditions elsewhere or concrete conditions of loss of self-reliance, dependent survival, and lack of advancement (Adeyemo 2003; Rodney 2009: 17; Ake 1980 in Asuk, 2019). The more pleasant term ‘developing’ is often substituted for ‘underdevelopment’.

. 2.3 TIME

The history of the philosophy of time shows constant expression of the difficulty inherent in the definition. Aristotle found it hard to define the concept of time. St. Augustine called it a human perplexity, while George Berkeley could only see the intelligibility of time when associated with

human activities. On its own, time is unintelligible. Isaac Newton was able to classify time as relative, apparent, common and absolute, yet, this great physicist was unable to give any precise definition of time (Iroegbu, 1994).

The concept “time” is ambiguous, hence its varied denotation and meaning. *The Merriam Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines time as the measured or measurable period during which an action, process, or condition exists or continues. Time in this aspect could be likened to duration which is also defined as a non-spatial continuum that is measured in terms of events which succeed one another from past through present to the future.

Time in its classical definition as given by Aristotle is the measure of motion according to before and after “*numerus motus secundum prius et posterius*”(Iroegbu, 2004). This implies that time depict that by which events, occasions, activities etc., are measured. Furthermore, time is basically the record of succession of events, bodies and other occurrences in the universe by the human mind. The succession involves three levels of temporality and intensity: past, present and future. From these, it can be deduced that inherent in the concept of time is the totality of human existence; past, present and future. Varied uses of the concept of time has ignited so many questions such as, “Is time real?”, “Is there an objective time?”, “Is time temporal?”, “Does it possess ontological dimensions?”, “Can we speak of time in reference to God?”

We will begin by stating that time is a universal concept in the mind. Granted that our knowledge of time is gathered from the events, activities and experiences around us, our idea of time goes beyond the empirical. Hence, “time is not an empirical concept, but a metaphysical notion that derives from the human rational power of transcendence and cognition”(Kant cited in Smith,

1970). Since time is a metaphysical concept that is derive from man's power of rationality, transcendence and cognition, we say that it is a concept in the human mind. The notion or concept of time exists in me, in you, in us. That is, the idea of time is first and foremost subjective before it is objective. There is no universal chart of time which everybody must comply. Therefore when we say that the concept of time is universal, we simply mean that "every entity (i.e., peoples and cultures) has the ontological (metaphysical) capacity to conceive and conceptualize time in its own way"(Okolo, 2002). In other words, time as a concept that exists in the minds of all human beings is universal, but since time cannot be separated from activities, it is left for every people of the world to concretize time by acculturating or developing their own concept of time which should be woven round every societal or communal event.

For Westerners, time is a linear, mechanical, utilitarian and numerical process requiring a calibrated and uniform standard of measurement. Heidegger sees time as temporal. For him, time is a being that regulates man hence it is within time that man realizes himself and time is what constitutes the structure of human reality. It vanishes at the emergence of the inevitable possibility which is death; when *Dasein* shall be opened into nothingness.

However, we cannot talk of time in reference to God because He is characterized by eternity and an infinity; without a beginning and an end.

2.3.1 AFRICAN CONCEPTION OF TIME

The African conceptualization of any reality could be easily gleaned from his interpretation of natural phenomena. In other words, "Africans in their traditional societies think of time in a

concrete fashion as they see and feel it in the rhythm of nature not in an abstract or mathematical manner of timepiece or gadgets of chronometer”(Okolo, 1987).

3.0 TIME TELLING IN TRADITIONAL AFRICA

Time in Ibibio is known as *ini*, in Igbo we say, *Oge*, *Akoko* in Yoruba. Hausa’s call it *Lokachi*, while for the Obaluku people of Ogoja it is *Koniong*. Time is captured in the sequence of days, weeks, months and years which are expressed as follows(in Efik/Ibibio), *Usen*(day), *Urua*(week), *Ofion*(Month), *Isua*(Year).

3.1 SHORT PERIODS

African conception of time can be classified under two headings which include “short periods” and “long periods”. This division is implicit in Etim’s assertion that,

The smallest unit of time is measured by the twinkling of an eye; short duration of time, by drying up of human sputum. Cockcrows indicate the beginning of the day while the night begins when the chickens begin to return to perch. The human shadows are used to reckon how distant the time is to aid from midday(Etim, 2005).

Among the Africans, the older people usually tell the children whom they send on errands to return before they close their eyes and open it, that is, in the twinkle of an eye; or to return before the sputum which they have spit on the ground or in their palms dry up. The idea of immediacy is expressed by the term “*idahaemi*”, which means “now” or “presently”. In Igbo, the short periods are expressed as *Ntabianya*(Seconds), *Nkeji*(Minutes) and *Elekere*(hours). All these combined in twenty-four hours make an *Ubochi*(a day), which itself is structured as

follows dawning or breaking of the day, morning or the period of sunrise, period of sunset, Nightfall, period of complete darkness and Midnight. Now, there are methods of determining these particular times by observation of phenomena in the physical environment.

Corroborating this, (Mbiti, 1975) posits that the African employs “phenomenon calendars” in which the events or phenomena which make up time are considered in their relation with one another, as distinguished from the “numerical calendar”, which is employed by the westerner and divides time into seconds, minutes, hours.

3.2 LONG PERIODS

Sometimes, days are used to represent the past, present and future in the immediate or not so distant period. For instance, *mkpong* (as in yesterday), *mfin* (today) or *ubamkpong* (as in two days ago). The same expression applies to ‘tomorrow’ and ‘in two day’s time’ with specific emphasis. This creates a sense of a longer period. Certainly, what follows the division of days is week. With particular reference to the Igbos, *Izu* or week is made up of four days, which include *Nkwo*, *Eke*, *Orie* and *Afor*. These incidentally form market days and also backgrounds from which Igbo name their children.

3.3 TIME AS RELATIVE

In African conception of time, time is relative to the individual and events that surrounds him. Time does stand out as in the clock-time for everyone to follow. (Etim, 2005) puts this explicitly, “among the Ibibio, time is not something objectively existing in itself, it is neither associated with the clock nor with specific moment in life continuum”. An idea similar to Heidegger’s

distinction of time as objective quantitative time and subjective existential time is also found in African conception of time. The objective quantitative time is the clock-time, whose past are gone and gone forever and its future are to come but not yet in existence. It is the subjective existential time that depicts African conception of time, since, the African man lives in a historical existence, coming from the past and moving towards the future which he shapes with his present choices.

That time lies within the control and manipulation of the African makes it a subjective phenomenon, thereby losing its objective bases. Thus, everyone's judgment in regards to time takes a subjective adherence. Since it is also relative to events; individuals within a culture, organization, group or a family consciously or unconsciously adapt to the time and event orientation of a particular culture or group.

4.0 WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

Most scholars agree that the concept of development implies an on-going process, that is, 'it is a dynamic rather than static concept'. Again, development is an all-round concept; it must be inclusive, more encompassing and not one-sided affair. The core areas of development are: "psycho-personal development, the intellectual-spiritual, the political-economic and the scientific-technological areas" (Mbaegbu, 2006). For all round and authentic development in Africa these various areas must be truly integrated. Consequently, a working definition by Iroegbu (1994) is more appropriate. According to him:

"Development is the progressive unfolding of the inner potentialities of a given reality. It is to develop, that is, to bring out

to light essential, functional and epistemic what was enveloped, folded or hidden. As it applies to people, development is the integration of the various givens: natural, physical, acquired and human, of a people towards a full working out, permanently and cumulatively, of their being as persons, of their community and their real productivity”

The implication of this definition is that any attempt to conceive development in terms of scientific and technological advancement to the utter neglect of the spiritual, moral and the socio-political spheres, etc.; is bound to precipitate material progress and low spiritual development. Our point of emphasis and repeated return is that development includes self-development. “Ability to satisfy life’s basic obligations, increase quantity and quality of life and transform his cultural environment to serve his integral needs as an embodied spirit”(Mbaegbu, 2006), is what development is all about. Development in theory and practice is concerned primarily with man, his needs and general welfare. As a matter of fact it is concerned with whatever increases man’s capacity to know more, have more in order to be more human. It belongs to man and man alone to improve himself through transforming his environment to serve his needs and desires.

Historically, networks of theorists have been orchestrated to explain the phenomenon of development. For instance, “the imperialist theory of development considers development in the light of the height reached by the western economically advanced economies”(Uduigwomen, 2012). Essentially, the peculiar features of most western oriented theories of development is their emphasis on economic and material progression as the absolute and independent ingredient of development. However, no nation can be said to be economically viable without the interplay of

credible structures of justice, ethics, education, cultural frameworks, etc. Hence, we have to acknowledge that growth and de-encasement is only an aspect of development. This buttresses the fact that development is not limited to material advancement. Thus, (Rodney, 2004) observes that “development in human society is a multidimensional process”. He avers that there is development at the individual and the economic levels. The former has to do with the increase in skills, band capacity, more liberty, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. The latter is said to be existent when members of the society increase jointly their scientific and technical knowledge for a better material condition.

It can be gleaned from Rodney’s analysis of both the material and individual notions of development that the focal point of development is the human person. Hence, Pope Paul VI demonstrates that sound development program has “in the last analysis, no other *raison d’etre* than the service of man. Such programs should reduce inequalities, fight discriminations, freeman from various types of servitude and enable him to be the instrument of its own material growth”(Populorum Progressio, 1967). Development via the above background could be viewed as a process of exploring, harnessing and integration of all the resources at man’s disposal for the actualization of the full potentialities of man.

Moreover, viable humano-centric development is measured by the level of sustainability. Sustainability as a concept has been given many definitions. But we will adopt the commonly used definition supplied by the *World Bank Report, 2003* which sees it as a “progress that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In other words, real and sustainable development should be futuristic. (Etim,2009),

makes it clearer that sustainable development refers to “growth and expression carried out in ways to ensure that future generation have at least the same opportunities as current generations”.

Some other definitions specify more explicitly the three pillars of sustainability namely, “economic, environmental and social.”(Uduigwomen, 2012). Sustainability, in this wise, reflects the idea of integral and holistic development of all sectors of the society as well as to forestall and prevent their depletion and deterioration. A process of development which passes as humano-centric and sustainable is well qualified as reliable, genuine or authentic. An authentic development, therefore, is such that “is capable of a sustainable integration and progressive positive transmission of the material and the immaterial component of human existence.”(Uduigwomen, 2012). It is the kind of development that looks at the humanized overhauling and revamping of the total facets of human existence ranging from the psycho-personal, the socio-cultural, the moral-religious, the intellectual-spiritual, the politico-economic and the scientific-technological.

Considerably, Etim(2009), holds that “genuine development is fundamentally about human beings in terms of ideas, which imbibe in them the quality to think qualitatively and tackle the problems that emerge out of their living condition. Stressing further into different aspects of development, Etim notes that “inadequate environmental protection is quite likely to undermine development; whereas absence of development will bring about failure of environmental protection”.

5.0 TIME AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Apart from the imprecision of African measurement of time which could create problems itself, Africa has not remained the same since the rape of its continent by the West who pretended to be on a “civilizing mission”. There was a total distortion of all the values of the African to the advantage of the West. For over two centuries now Africa is not certain as to the path of civilization to follow: Afrocentric or Eurocentric? (Onwubiko, 1991)observed this while noting that the phrase “‘African time’ refers to the half-Europeanized and half-de-Africanized Africans who are finding it difficult to adjust to the ‘clock-time’ category”. But what is wrong with African time?

Apart from the problem of indoctrination and imposition of models on Africa, there seems to be the problem of authoritarianism and conservatism with regard to our customs and traditions; and we do not want these changed. Many of them have remained clogs in the wheel of progress. Any removing of these obstacles remains an essential task for Africa. Ogugua(2003), opines that “there is need for us to sit up, cogitate, reflect on our situation and experience; and thereby raise our consciousness, and get prepared and set to forge ahead inspite of odds and romance development”.

According to a Ghanaian writer, “one of the main reasons for the continuing underdevelopment of our country is our nonchalant attitude to time and the need for punctuality in all aspects of life. The problem of punctuality has become so endemic that lateness to any function is accepted and explained off as ‘African time’(Nigeriavillage square online).

Truly, Development is a form of change and “change involves time”(Iroegbu, 2004). To talk of change is to talk, among other things of time. What role does time play in the development of Africa. The unpleasant step at this point is to take a look at the facts and figures on how traditional African conception of time has hampered development in Africa.

No one offers what he or she does not have. Before anyone can contribute meaningfully to the growth of any society such a person must be reasonably equipped. One way through which this could be done is through education. However, African attitude to time and education has adversely affected development. If an African ever saw the need for a Child’s education, it must be at an age that is already late. Lack of early education deprives most African societies of benefiting from adequate man-power at a proper time. One who acquires knowledge at an old age may not live so long to put that knowledge to effective use. Compared to the western counterparts where a child below one is already at kindergarten to be groomed on how to handle gadgets, an African child would be advised to undergo some rituals before beginning any formal education.

African’s lack of respect for time has caused low productivity in organizations filled with old people who cannot deliver again. The old employees refuse to retire neither does the employer sees the need in asking them to give way to young and vibrant men and women. Another version of this attitude is the sit-tightism in the leadership structure and different African polity. It is undisputable that no one has a monopoly of knowledge. Long years of governance by a particular person who has been reelected brings the state to a halt or stagnation especially when the person in question is not doing anything to develop the situation of persons.

Moreover, lack of respect for time could also be seen in strike actions. Long periods of strikes in Africa where the people at the helm of affairs seem to be less concerned undoubtedly bring the people's economy to a halt. Strike actions affect all spheres of individual (economic) lives thereby depriving citizens of the benefits of their essential daily needs.

African's attitude to time has scared a lot of foreign investors away. Africa is underdeveloped because of our willingness to take everything for granted. Our attitude to time has contributed enormous economic waste to Africa. Many developmental projects have been financially revised upwards because of low attitude on value of time. If Africans fail to do something as simple as showing up on time for work or for an appointment, then how can we convince the developed nations for foreign aid or investment; that we can manage a project and meet a deadline? For instance, World economic studies and survey some years back shows that "Nigeria is the second highest country in the world with the highest man-hour lost in all government official transaction"(www.Nigeriavillagesquareonline). Time is money, if we cannot spend our time wisely, then how can we spend our money wisely? Punctuality is the soul of business and should therefore be the soul and engine of our development as a country and as individual.

The African concept of time as that which is meaningful in relation to events, and as an object liable to manipulation or under the control of man makes adherence and compliance to agreements and duties to also fall at the discretion, and judgment of individuals or the contracting parties. As such people will not take their duties, contracts, and jobs, even vivacious and salient issues as strict and important as they are. And so encourage laissez-faire attitudes to duties and issues of magnum importance.

Tardiness can be contagious, because when other people expect you to be late for a meeting, it increases the likelihood that they will not show up on time to avoid waiting for you. Your lack of punctuality also negatively affects other people's time management plans. Co-workers will either delay the start of the meeting or when you come they spend time telling you what you missed when you finally arrive. Either way, your tardiness communicates disrespect and lack of accountability. This could lead to lack of trust both in career and personal life.

Also, long hours spent on attendance of official meeting (closed door meetings) that actually yield no results are creating barriers to efficiency. Such time should be reduced because they are obliged to go to different sectors of their work and ascertain whether the employers are living up to expectation or not. Where proper supervision is not done, there is bound to be lukewarm and laissez-faire attitude towards duties and contracts. For instance, in Africa today, many projects are left unaccomplished or unexecuted not because they have not been awarded but because of lack of honest and dedicated supervision.

Where staff resume official duties by 10am and do special daily prayer for another one hour is waste of the already awful 'African time'. Worst still, are those who go late and leave early. Time is money says a proverb, but turn it around and you get a precious truth. Money is time. Lateness of this sort simply leads to procrastination and its attendant evil of never accomplishing any set goal.

Punctuality is crucial to improve a person's professionalism. The reason for this is obvious; tardiness creates a cycle of poor time management and unreliability. In addition, it betrays a lack of concern for other people and is simply unprofessional(www.ezinearticlesonline).

African perception of time as a dimension of history also retards development. Often, many communities and persons have refused to offer pieces of land or old irrelevant sites for infrastructural development. This is over conservatism and a life lived in the past especially when the new idea is one that will provide the basic needs of the people thereby raising their standard of living.

Considerably, "African time" weakens the law and cheapens the sense of discipline among Africans. Our time for work is time to play, time to sleep is time to wake-up(and rob), time to govern is our time to loot, time to resume work is our time to close, time to eat is time to play; time to resign from office is our time to seat-tight. These entire blemishes spoil the beauty of Africa, because of the poor and low value we place on time

Finally, this laxity towards appointments and obligations, thus, as we have seen has great impacts on society; *inter alia*, loss of revenue, inability to reschedule appointments, and inability to complete tasks.

6.0 EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The problem of time has to do with how the human mind perceives reality. For example, the mind cuts time into discrete units: seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, seasons, years, decade,

centuries, cosmic years and so on. But time is a continuum, with no breaks rhythms or cycles. Our minds create units of measurement for the time-continuum so that we can conceive it in usable “lengths”, then we label these units and proceed to think in “units of time”, we then begin to believe that such “units of time” are real. But where do “hours” exist? Or “days?” or “years?”. When we request, “give me five minutes”, what do we get? Five minutes of what? “Time” of course, but once measured what exactly do we have? One must conclude that such units exist only in the mind. Our minds create. In other words, the source of time derives from human powers of transcendence and cognition. The only way to make this power seen or felt is through the actualization of our dreams in our day to day activities. By so doing the “lengths” of time is put into use. Time cannot be separated from progress and development. Time as development is the ability to be tenacious and consistently dogged towards achieving our set objectives.

Time waits for no one, therefore, make hay while the sun shines. These sayings imply that time is that which cannot be controlled or influenced, but continues to flourish. For when time is halted by an individual, a culture, or community to suit a particular aim, that of other cultures continues to progress, while the former is left behind the progress. Such could be likened to the African time, since their attitude to time is in a retrogressive manner. However, Africa, though, less productive, but enjoys greater satisfaction of life, and values family more. Africans should, perhaps, be praised for their ability to prioritize, and perhaps, their greater ability to multitask, than be obliged to change their cultural lifestyle.

Researchers make it clear that in Africa, people have a greater ability to multi-task, and at any moment in time, they are able to complete a number of different tasks and that this may signal an ability to achieve more things in a space in time than their European counterparts. Thus,

In the European mentality, inversely, there is a greater attention to time, so that tasks are done consecutively, not simultaneously. This generally, means Europeans are more dependent on schedules and lists, and can often find free time overwhelming. From this angle, African time promotes a greater ability to adapt and handle uncertainty(www.Nigeriavillageonline)

This serves as one of the defects of the western conception of time, especially as it has little or no considerations to circumstances that be-cloud every day existence by sticking to its strict and dogmatic approach to time issues. Actually, one cannot say for sure that in the next minute, he/she will honour an invitation without delay or failure. Exigencies are liable to occur.

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