



The African Concept of Time: A Perspective of John Samuel Mbiti

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Abstract

This scientific contribution, halfway between metaphysics and ontology of human being, analyzes the uses of time in its African essence based on a critique by John Samuel Mbiti. In other words, it seeks to understand the abstract dynamics of time, its meaning and its uses in an African cultural context. Based on a philosophical constructivism of temporality, this research appropriates and questions the identity, civilizational and ontological processes relating to the conception and construction of the notion of time in Negro culture. The hermeneutic approach to philosophical data will make it possible to identify the meanings and nonsense, even the material and immaterial dimension of time in Africa. The results of this research indicate that according to the John Samuel Mbiti approach, time is a fixed and backward-looking construct.

Keywords: Time, Being, Human Being, Negro Culture, Hermeneutics.

Introduction

The issue of time and temporality is a complex reality. In truth, this concept is polysemic insofar as the meaning or meanings assigned to it are diverse and varied in their understanding. Time can be the result of a particular philosophy, a worldview or even a societal construction based on a specific aim. Human societies throughout history have defined and given meaning to what we assimilate as time. For John Samuel Mbiti, he calls for a philosophy of time that is intended to be the key to the intelligibility of traditional African religions and anthropocentric ontology, that is to say, "the being of man." The notion of time is plural according to considerations, ideologies, worldviews, cultures, value systems, imaginations and collective representations. However, the interest of this section is that it analyzes the variable time and/or temporality in the Negro-African cultural universe. At this level, it is a question of exploring the way in which the African presents the vector of time. In the Negro-African cultural universe, the

concept of time has nothing to do with the idea of Western societies. As a result, Negro-African thought since Egyptian antiquity has formalized a model of understanding time based on infinite circularity. For Negro-African societies, which are a continuum of ancient Egypt, time is not governed by the principle of gradual linearity, but rather by its cyclical dimension. It is in the same perspective that epistemologists of history, notably Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Boubou Hama, are situated. From the above, this article is structured around the problem of knowing what are the uses of time in African civilization and metaphysics from the perspective of John Samuel Mbiti? The analysis of this problem has been divided into three main axes. In the first section, a conceptual approach to time in cultural space and African metaphysics is addressed. In the second perspective, this reflection analyzes the conception of time and religious being in John Samuel Mbiti. Finally, this article deals with the uses and philosophical purpose of John Samuel Mbiti more especially in the conception of time which opens up future perspectives.

I- THE CONCEPTION OF TIME IN AFRICAN CULTURAL AND METAPHYSICAL SPACE

According to Norbert Élias, "the time of individuals is not autonomous, free from all attachments; it is part of that of the society in which they live".¹ This statement by the sociologist highlights the close and binary relationship that links the ontology of human being to temporality. Furthermore, it allows us to understand that temporalities are plural and are evaluated according to the societal, cultural, civilizational and philosophical contexts that govern the human framework and the dynamics of hominization of culture, that is to say, how the evolutionary thought of man appropriates time.

1- The Meaning of Time in Negro Culture

The concept of time has a multitude of definitions. Discussing time without alluding to space is a conceptual challenge. Consequently, their intricacy makes it very difficult to separate them. The Universal Dictionary tells us that time is: "That dimension of the Universe according to which the irreversible succession of phenomena seems to be ordered".² That is to say, time is an orderly and continuous advance of everything that is subject to its influence. It is about Dasein, "Being-there," and the beings that are subject to it. In fact, time is a "game of time." The physicist Étienne Klein defines it as "the interrupted movement by which the present becomes

¹Cf. NORBERT Élias quoted by OFFENSTADT Nicolas, "*Historians and Time*", in *Historiography*, 2011, pp. 9-23.

²CERQUIGLINI Bernard, OLLÉ Jean-michelle, (s/d), Universal Dictionary, 5th edition, Paris, Hachette/Edicef, 2008, p. 1228.

past."³. Time also implies the future. The future tense is a projection of the mind of events that have not yet taken place. The event is what marks the reality of time in the African conception: it is the "actual time"⁴ according to John Samuel Mbiti.

In reality, phenomena are not timeless but rather are in time, which fades irreversibly. This position confirms the idea that phenomena, that is, events and everything we perceive, are concretely in time. Only God transcends time and is outside of it. The same is true of the Augustinian conception of time. Therefore, by reexamining Saint Augustine's thought in depth, we find that his idea of a God transcending time is a central aspect of his theology. Augustine of Hippo, as he can still be called, is an African by origin, born in Thagaste. Although he is best known for his contributions to Christianity and Western philosophy, his analyses of time, including its definition, specifically in his book *The Confessions* have had a significant effect over time in both Africa and the West. In his view, time is a real and complex phenomenon under a three-dimensional scheme: the past, the present, and the future. He mentions that the present is authentically tangible. According to John Samuel Mbiti, this is precisely the case in Africa where time is more experienced in the present, since time is defined according to the events that take place in the present.

In his difficulty in defining the concept of time, Saint Augustine gives to the nature of time the idea that time is a creation of God and that the latter is located outside of time. On this, he will realize an obscure reality of the nature of time. To define time, he asks himself a whole series of questions: "What then is time?"⁵. Moreover, he struggles to answer by alleging: "If no one asks me, I know it well; but if someone asks me, and I undertake to explain it, I find that I do not know it."⁶ Indeed, time is an enigma involving a definitional uncertainty. It is strictly speaking a mysterious reality; in short, there is a mystery of time, he thinks. Man is totally immersed in time, and it presents itself as a familiar but mystical and mythical reality.

Time and space are two physical realities, because they are intrinsically linked. The environment in which living beings live is always just as much modified by time as the continuous and eternal change of these beings that live there. Nothing is apprehended outside the spatio-temporal dimension. Everything is in time and space. Immanuel Kant believes that time

³KLEIN Étienne, By the Futura editorial team, interviewed by Futura-science and published online on August 25, 2023, <https://www.futura-scienceq.com/sciences/definitions/physique-temps-325/>, accessed December 23, 2024 at 9:06 a.m.

⁴MBITI John Samuel, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Heinemann, London, Ibadan, Nairobi, 1969, p.16.

⁵Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, Book XI, Chap. XVI, Translation of Arnaud d'Andilly, Editions Gallimard, 1993. p.421.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 422.

and space is the a priori frameworks of sensibility⁷. For him, the spatio-temporal phenomenon is an objective property of the world. Time and space are subjective frameworks that structure our sensory experience. Regarding time, he rightly states: "Time is therefore given a priori."⁸ The concept of time refers to a succession of events and duration. Space, on the other hand, refers to the distance and position of objects. It is obvious that space and time are a priori conditions of our perception and understanding of the world. Without them, no knowledge is possible.

According to Henri Bergson, time is lived duration. In other words, he says exactly: "real duration is what we have always called time."⁹Bergson highlights the wearing down of time in his definition without, however, contradicting that of Kant when he declares that: "Time implies succession, I do not deny."¹⁰The notion of time accounts for change and mobility in the world. In this regard, we understand that it is time that structures the environmental universe. The definition of time remains in all its senses an ontological phenomenon that has not been lacking in writing in the philosophy of time in the African context by John Samuel Mbiti.

2- The African Concept of Time in the Perspective of John Samuel Mbiti

In his book *African Religions and Philosophy*, John Samuel Mbiti, a Kenyan and African philosopher and theologian, protests against the Western concept of time, which he considers artificial and foreign to African culture. Linear or Western time does not correspond to the realities of Negro culture. This is what Théophile Obenga thinks similarly: "The Western concept of time is foreign to African culture and represents an obstacle to exchange between African and Western thinkers."¹¹The concept of time in Western societies is similar to a supply, that is, a good or a product that can be traded. However, in traditional African societies, time must be created and produced. This is so because Africans neither run after nor chase time. In the eyes of John Samuel Mbiti,

In western or technological society, time is a commodity which must be utilized, sold and bought; but in traditional African life, time has to be created and produced. Man is not a slave of time instead; he makes as much time as he wants. When foreigners, especially from Europe and America, come to Africa and see people sitting down somewhere without, obviously, doing

⁷KANT Emmanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Translation by Jules Barni revised by P. Archambault, Éditions Garnier-Flammarion, 1976, p. 90.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁹Bergson Henri, *The Perception of Change*, (1911), PUF, 1959, p. 166.

¹⁰*Idem.*

¹¹Cf. OBENGA Théophile, quoted by LEONHARD Harding, "Conception Africaine de l'Histoire et du temps", Institut d'histoire compare des civilisations (SID), *La recherche en histoire et l'enseignement de l'histoire en Afrique Centrale francophone*, Publication de l'Université de Province, 1997, p. 35.

*anything, they often remark, these Africans waste their time by just sitting idle. Another common cry is, that Africans are always late*¹²

However, John Samuel Mbiti will demonstrate that this Western way of thinking about Africans is only proof of their ignorance and only stems from the simple and false prejudices they have about black people. Thus, the black man, not being a slave to time, “makes” according to his will the quantity of time that is necessary for him. This man has no pressure regarding time. The African man gives himself sufficient time since he creates it. The white man therefore has no idea what time means according to the black man. To weaken this negative conception of time concerning Africans, the black theologian philosopher states: “It is easy to jump to such judgments, but they are judgments based on ignorance of what time means to African peoples. Those who are seen sitting down, are actually not wasting time, but either waiting for time or in the process of producing time.”¹³.

Time in traditional African life is not calculated only according to mathematical objectivities, but, it is calculated from natural events. This is what justifies the fact that according to the definitional designer of the philosophy of time in Africa: “time is a composition of events, people cannot and do not reckon in a vacuum”¹⁴. Time is a specific phenomenon and consequently, it does not fall into the void. It is non-being, this void, the ‘No-time’ which does not exist. Nothing exists. There is only time, the conceivable-realized (Actual and potential time according to John Mbiti), the concreteness of the reality of the being which creates it.

Indeed, time does not fall into a vacuum. That is why there is no future. Future time is the indefinite-finite, while past and present time is definite-infinite specificity, because it is cyclical and real and known. But, we can also envisage a realizable future in the African conception of time according to the metaphysician of time this because there is no future except potential. The definition of time according to our author is an event-based composition. That is why he thinks that for Africans: “time is simply a composition of events which have occurred”¹⁵. According to John Samuel Mbiti, this means that time is only defined when an event has taken place. In other words, “it is the event that determines temporal reality; otherwise, there is no time”¹⁶ It is not far from this definition from Larousse by Étienne Klein, according to which time is like “an environment in which events follow one another”¹⁷

¹²MBITI John Samuel, *African Religion and Philosophy*, p.19.

¹³*Idem.*

¹⁴*Idem.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁶*Idem.*

¹⁷KLEIN Étienne, *op. cit.*, consulted on December 23, 2024 at 10:23 a.m.

In the same perspective, the event is defined in real time and potential time. The first is inscribed in the past and the present, that is to say in the event process, what is in the past and in the present, probably not in the future. The second is inscribed in the future where events that we envisage are certain to occur. Then, the latter are inscribed in the inevitable rhythm of natural phenomena. This state of affairs is explained by concepts of an African language specific to John Samuel Mbiti: Swahili. These are indeed “Sasa’ and ‘Zamani”¹⁸ which respectively means ‘now-period’¹⁹ and “unlimited past”²⁰.

We note that between real and potential time, there is a Heraclitean mobilism that does not hide itself. Except that it is an event in perpetual motion, determined and delimited between the past and the present. This is why the African conception of time in John Samuel Mbiti is backward-looking and fixed. It is the "mobilism of cycling" that is to say, a time that perpetuates itself in the repetition of the events that characterize it infinitely. The philosopher-theologian justifies this hypothesis by writing:

*If, however, future events are certain to occur, or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature, they at best constitute only potential time, not actual time. (...) Actual time is therefore what is present and what is past. It moves backward rather than forward; and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place.*²¹

The concept of backward and forward is used by the author to better express the role of real time and potential time. First, it is the present and past event while the second is the future event that is certain. In Africa, therefore, is real everything that in time and even time itself moves “backward” rather than “forward” with an unimaginable future. Let us listen to John Mbiti: “When this has taken place, then the events moves backwards from the Sasa into the Zamani. So Zamani becomes the period beyond which nothing can go.”²²

The notion of time in Africa is conceived as a cycle. We speak of cyclical time: it is a continuous and infinite process unlike that of the West. John Mbiti insists: “The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking.”²³. Indeed, Westerners have an "indefinite" conception of time because the envisaged future is as if lost and non-existent, while Africans, on the other hand, have an "infinite" conception of time. According to them, the cyclical nature of African time does not end, since events do not stop either. Western time in its linear nature admits a past, a present and

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁹*Idem.*

²⁰*Idem.*

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 17.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 23.

²³MBITI John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Op. cit., p. 17.

an indefinite future and, what is indefinite is unknown and therefore falls into the category of inexistence also called 'No-time'. However, African time devoted to cycling is infinite, that is to say, without end. In short, it is considered as an endless cycle. It is also event-based and what defines it more is the fact that these events are repeated perpetually and permanently. It is two-dimensional with a past and a present, and, an unimaginable future.

II- JOHN MBITI'S AFRICAN CONCEPTION OF TIME AND RELIGIOUS BEING

John Samuel Mbiti's philosophical constructivism is based on what he claims to be "the philosophy of time"²⁴. We can therefore read this from his pen: "the concept of time is basic to our understanding of African religions and philosophical issues."²⁵ That is to say, time is the basis of any understanding of traditional religions and philosophy in Africa. It is the key to the intelligibility of African realities. The concept of time in Africa is a dynamic and continuous process. The philosophy of time in the wake of Negritude grasps the realities of being as it is religious and rational. Thus, the question of time in the thought of being and religion concomitantly involves the problematic of being and time in a first moment and also of religious being and time secondly in the African context. Clearly, the paradigm of temporality insinuates a double paradigm in the philosophical constructivism of John Mbiti namely: that of religious being and anthropocentric ontology.

1- On the Question of Time in the thought of Being

The problem of the thought of being and time in Africa is a synthesis of the idea of the question of time in the thought of the African being. In short, it is everything that John Samuel Mbiti claims to be the philosophy of time as Byang H. Kato states: "Dr. Mbiti builds his theology almost entirely around what he claims to be the African concept of time."²⁶ Indeed, John Samuel Mbiti's hypothesis on the philosophy of time in an African context helps us understand not only what time is, but also the ecstasies of time among Africans, as well as the meaning they have in contrast to time in the West. He puts it clearly in these terms:

The most significant factor is that Time is considered as a two-dimensional phenomenon; with a long past; and a dynamic present. The future as we know it in the linear conception of Time is

²⁴KATO K. Byang, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, Evangel Publishing House, Kisumu, Kenya, 1975, p. 57.

²⁵MBITI John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Op. cit, p. 2.

²⁶*Idem.*

*virtually non-existent in Akamba thinking. My findings from other African peoples have not yielded any radical difference.*²⁷

The notion of time in its dichotomous dimension allows us to understand that the individual in Negro culture is an existing reality whose mobility of being corresponds to real time. The being in Negro culture is a spatio-temporal being. Because, he lives in the space and time that define him. John Samuel Mbiti believes that the concept of time is the keystone, better of the intelligibility of African realities, and therefore of being. And, being is in space. In short, it is a space-time being.

Moreover, John Samuel Mbiti defines the African being as a fundamentally anthropocentric ontology. In view of the importance of the human being in the world, it has been at the center of all concern since its creationist origins. John Samuel Mbiti believes that man is at the heart of all existence and conceives everything in terms of his being. This is also why he speaks of an anthropocentric ontology. He rightly states: "African ontology is basically anthropocentric: man is at the very center of existence, and African peoples see everything else in its relation to this central position of man."²⁸ Indeed, African ontology places man at the center of creation. Man maintains a dynamic relationship with nature; he is in a trance with nature. His interconnection with the universe allows John Samuel Mbiti to say that human beings are perceived as active agents in the universe.

This idea leads to the fact that man, being at the center of the universe, has a great responsibility towards nature. This is where an epistemology of natural sciences comes into force in African philosophy. The human species is positioned as responsible for the preservation and harmony in nature. Karl Marx in his *Manuscripts of 1884* already noted the relationship between man and nature. This care or commitment to nature implies a respectful interaction with the environment, and consolidates by energizing the idea that humans play a key role in cosmic balance.

Furthermore, the ontological being in its African context is fundamentally defined from its interrelation principles of the environment in which it lives. Its requirements cross the notion of temporality and remain there. In the perspective of John Samuel Mbiti, the being in Negro culture is a Being-other, that is to say, the Being in relation with others. Human relationships are very crucial and remain forever across space and time. As for African ontology, the being as man or human is not an isolated individual. Nevertheless, he is a relational being this is so because his identity is influenced and determined by social interactions, family and community ties. We

²⁷MBITI John Samuel, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 24.

²⁸MBITI John Samuel, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 92.

notice this state of affairs in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in his book *La phénoménologie de la perception* approaches social interactions from the angle of phenomenology, emphasizing the perception and experience lived by men. Since time is linked to human experience, the being unfolds in relation to the present existence of his alter ego (in Africa, it is a person in whom absolute trust is reserved). He is a being in relation with others, thus regulating a harmonious coexistence in space and time. He takes into account the smallest detail concerning the life he shares with the other members of his community. By the way, John Mbiti justifies: "I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."²⁹ This phenomenon of community solidarity begins long before an individual's birth, during their experience with others, and after their existence. This is an idea already defended by Aristotle in his work *The Statesman*, because for him, sociability is a fundamentally human characteristic. Man is a political animal who is called to live in society or in community with others.

Besides, "Le *Dasein* c'est-à-dire l'être de l'homme"³⁰ selon Martin Heidegger n'est rien d'autre que ce que John Samuel Mbiti a appelé "An anthropocentric ontology"³¹ en context africain. Also, the African being, unlike the Heideggerian being in his books *Being and Time*, does not know finitude with the passing of time. The humanitarian value in the African tradition has transcended time, which fades irreversibly. For, it is a human species with great values of such a sign that even with the phenomenon of temporality, does not know perishability. It is a being with extreme values that benefits from the future only by drawing on its ancestral being, which it represents by and in the past and limits itself to the present. Being in the future is useless since there is no effective event that truly marks its effective presence. Indeed, the future is a void "Being-man" because an individual in the Black African cultural space is a being in the present that is based on its relationship as an active and not passive actor towards others.

However, we must understand from the pen of John Samuel Mbiti that in Africa, human relations are at the very foundation of human being which is an anthropocentric ontology leading to an interrelation life in space and time.

2- On The Question of Time in the thought of the Religious Being

John Samuel Mbiti's philosophical constructivism, in dealing with the philosophy of time, immediately opens up to a double problematic of metaphysics: time and religion in relation to being. In principle, it is about time as the key to understanding human being in the sense that

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 108.

³⁰ HEIDEGGER Martin, *Être et Temps*, Trad. François Vezin Rudolph Doehm, Alphonse de Waelhens, Jean Lauxerois et Claude Roëls, Paris, Gallimard, 1953, p. 51.

³¹MBITI John Samuel, *op. cit.*, p. 15-16.

John Samuel Mbiti supports the hypothesis that African ontology is a religious and extremely anthropocentric ontology. He adds: “Africans have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology, (...) an extremely anthropocentric ontology.”³². According to John Samuel Mbiti, religion arises in traditional African life as “an ontological phenomenon”³³ that is, an ontological phenomenon in symbiosis with religion.

In reality, it is a question of existence or being. This imposes a spiritual dimension of human being. Note that it is through time that we can understand African philosophy and religions. In fact, these are related to the being that poses itself as a religious being. John Samuel Mbiti declares: “in their traditional life African peoples are deeply religious.”³⁴ And, John Samuel Mbiti insists on the fact that the human being has a profoundly spiritual and essential dimension. The idea of God has embodied the spirit of Africans in such a way that religion is above all else. He continues by saying: “It is religion, more than anything else, which colors their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe.”³⁵

For him, beliefs in ancestral beings, deities and spiritual forces prove that man is in a permanent dialogue with the sacred (God), thus reinforcing his central role in the universe which is also deeply religious. Thus, John Samuel Mbiti writes at length:

*We have already pointed out that within traditional life, the individual is immersed in a religious participation which starts before birth and continues after his death. For him therefore, and for the larger community of which he is part, to live is to be caught up in a religious drama. This is fundamental, for it means that man lives in a religious universe. Both that world and practically all its activities in it, are seen and experienced through a religious understanding and meaning. for Africans, the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon; man is a deeply religious being living in a religious universe.*³⁶

Indeed, let us remember that the being in time according to John Samuel is deeply and fundamentally religious. This is why he aspires to a better end after his life on earth.

It's about time from a biblical perspective. In short, it's eschatology. Eschatology is the science that studies the end of time. Is there an end of time in the African context? How can we understand being in time and religion in time? So, the answer to these questions actually targets the idea of the question of time in thinking about the question of religion in Africa. Here, then, it's the synthesis of religious being and time.

³²*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

³³*Idem.*, p. 15.

³⁴MBITI John Samuel, *Religions and Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 262.

³⁵*Idem.*

³⁶MBITI John Samuel, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 32.

Before eschatology came into force and investigated the concept of time from the biblical perspective, John Samuel Mbiti in his book *African Religions and Philosophy*, already treated religion as an ontological phenomenon from the African point of view. In doing so, he justified the hypothesis that time is the keystone to arrive at the understanding of African religions and also of philosophy. He recalled all the same that it is not a pretension to affirm that time is capable of explaining everything, but it is very obvious that it increases a plus to our guidance on this subject. To this effect, he writes precisely:

*My approach in this book is to treat religion as an ontological phenomenon, with the concept of time as the key to reaching some understanding of African religions and philosophy. I do not pretend that the notion of time explains everything, but I am convinced that it adds to our understanding of the subject, and if that much is achieved, these efforts will have been more than adequately rewarded.*³⁷

III- FROM USES TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL PURPOSE OF TIME IN JOHN MBITI AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

In his philosophical and religious work, John Samuel Mbiti continues his investigations into the philosophy of time, which he clearly sets out. In dealing with the uses of time, he examines this notion in a distinct manner while highlighting the differences that exist between Western and African conceptions. This allows him to arrive at the purpose of time, which, according to him, is deeply rooted in African cosmology and spirituality.

1- From uses to the Purpose of Time

To get to the heart of the matter, it seems appropriate to postulate that in the Black African cultural paradigm, the notion of temporality is dominated by the principle of circularity: it is the symbol of infinity. We are witnessing a theory of the cycling of temporality. There is a secular use of time that is expressed in a repetitive and infinite way in all areas of life. Indeed, it is this infinity that particularizes and thereby distinguishes the African conception of time from that of the West. For many cultures in the African tradition, time is perceived as being cyclical rather than linear. As we have already mentioned above, time is event-based for Africans. John Mbiti rightly states: “Time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur.”³⁸ This means that events repeat themselves in cycles such as seasons, rituals, etc. From then on, it is obvious that it is the event that composes time and not the other way round.

³⁷*Ibid*, p. 14.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 17.

Ostensibly, the African conception of time serves teleological purposes because it is much more practical and manageable. In traditional Negro-culture societies, time follows the rhythm of a circle. It is repeated by events linked to collective life in the community. Traditionally, the conception of time is phenomenal. Because it is determined by the natural events that constitute it, such as the sun, the moon, the song of birds or that of the farmyard, as well as the seasons. The chronological system and calculation of time is based on natural phenomena and events. For example, an African makes time according to his objectives. Evening, night, morning, is logical ordinances of nature that allow the African being to pace time as he wishes.

Thus, in traditional African life, time is drawn in all areas. Here, it is the cultural aspect that predominates. The agricultural calendar is based on the seasons, lunar cycles, climatic events, etc. These allow for planning field work, sowing times, and harvests in better and real time. Indeed, time is inherent in the various activities of men such as agriculture, hunting, fishing, gathering, and collecting among the pygmies, for example. We can just as easily speak of capitalism in African culture in terms of temporal use. The individual in African society considers time as a resource to be exploited to maximize productivity and profit. By making good use of time, the future is automatically expressed as the very purpose of time without, however, taking into account its limits, which turn out to be outdated and fixed and so, the prospects for the future.

2- Future Prospects

To define time outside of future perspectives is to deny its mobilist nature. From Heraclitean mobilism to the being that does not change and remains in Parmenides, time as an ontological phenomenon has retained its shifting character, which is movement. In Africa, time moves in space through events that indicate it. The African conception of time with its cyclical character regulates and updates the didactic-pedagogical dimension of teaching and learning. In the distant future, time in Black African culture allows us to engrave on stone ideas that reflect and construct a depth of "life-being" in a much more pragmatic sense.

It is about time as a resource to be exploited to maximize productivity and profit. For, John Mbiti speaks in a word of the "event." Time as event can still be understood as time is work. So, through the concept of the circularity of time and therefore infinity, the black people are now part of the perpetual register of Homo-faber. By working, they are Homo-sapien. This is why they reflect wisely by calculating time phenomenally. It is much more practical than this uncreated time in Western world which ends linearly and is lost over time, because it is abstract

and theoretical. However, in Africa, no hour passes without being calculated and realized by the events that compose it for it is the event that profoundly marks the future.

Historically, time is an indicator of a people's history and even of their destiny. John Samuel Mbiti did well to integrate time into the African cultural space as the sine qua non of understanding its realities. Certainly, it is fixed and backward-looking, but it is cyclical and continuous. The African conception of time leaves its traces in the past and projects itself into the future by passing through the present. This is what Njoh-Mouellé says: "From the past to the present, there must be a common thread."³⁹The author urges the merit that time reserves in Negro culture and traditional.

In short, he's thinking about modernity. For him, there's a great deal of continual and coherent consideration between the past and the present. This means that "the common thread" is continuity. So, the thread that passes from the past to the present is undoubtedly the temporal dimension that must be preserved. That is, the values that will continue as a guideline to mark our identity and ensure our security in the future. John Mbiti calls this "The search for new values, identity and security."⁴⁰Indeed, new values are sought for a harmonious world promoted by living together. It illustrates the close relationship that allows us to correlate the event experiences of our traditions-cultures and the lessons of the past with present realities, to better build a better future.

This idea reintroduces John Samuel Mbiti's hypothesis of the African philosophy of time, which is intended to be backward-looking and cyclical. For the continuous and infinite cycle represents the day, the night, the months, the permanent years, which are intended to be worthily accomplished by their cultural value, which resides in the past. John Samuel Mbiti believes that the past traces the identity and security of being in Negro culture through the search for new values.

Conclusion

All in all, time is a triptych-like, yet infinite interval that inscribes the past, present, and future in space. To refuse and traverse these trilogical ecstasies of temporality would be to pejoratively assess the reductionist character of the being devoted to time, and even time itself, as John Samuel Mbiti had already insinuated by defining time in different ways, it is an ordered and continuous advance of everything that undergoes its influence. With John Samuel Mbiti, its

³⁹NJOH-MOUELLE Ébénézer, *From Mediocrity to Excellence. Essay on the Human Meaning of Development* (1970), Yaoundé, Third edition, CLÉ, 1998, p. 61.

⁴⁰MBITI John Samuel, *African Religions and Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 262.

cyclical and continuous character, stemming from the events that constitute it, this allows us to grasp all African realities and even the reality of its being.

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