



AFRICAN TIME: A POSITIVE VALUE

VITALIS OPARA. Ph.D

Department of Philosophy
Imo State University, Owerri.
Okwuchi63@gmail.com
+2348160203318

Abstract

African time is perceived as cultural tendency in parts of Africa towards a more relaxed attitude to time. This paper examines the notion of African time. The paper observed that African time as perceived by many is more or less pejorative and a misnomer, since African does not operate a timescale different from the rest of humanity. However African time should speak of quality time. Time in Africa should not be synonymous with tardiness. This paper is of the view that time with respect to Africa, should be treated with every sense of dignity. There is need to expose this view the more with every sense of dignity to Africa as a positive value and what it stand for. This write up emphatically states that African time is indeed a quality time.

INTRODUCTION

It is unfortunate and disgusting that many people across the world still think like Ludwig that Africans are incapable of any philosophical conception; some who are more liberal said that Africans are capable of reasoning intelligently but at the lowest ebb of thought¹. This work is an affirmative reaction to Onyeocha's view on African Time that African Time is not tardiness as alleged by the west, but a quality time dedicated to the full accomplishment of a set-activity or task²

African Time

Africa time or African time is the perceived cultural tendency in parts of Africa and the Caribbean towards a more relaxed attitude to time³. This is sometimes

used in a pejorative sense about tardiness in appointments, meetings and events⁴. This also includes the more leisurely related and less rigorous scheduled lifestyle formed in African countries especially as opposed to the more clock bound pace of daily life in western countries⁵. Within Britain, African time is also known as black people's time⁶ The appearance of a simple lack of punctuality or Lax attitude about time in Africa may instead reflect a different approach and method in management of tasks events and interactions. African cultures are often described as polychromic which means people tend to manage more than one thing at a time rather than in a strict sequence⁷. Personal interactions and relationship are also managed in this way such that it is not common to have more than one simultaneous conversation. An African emotional time consciousness has been suggested which contrasts with western mechanical time consciousness.

Time Orientation

The concept of African time has become a key topic of self criticism in modern Africa,⁸ the happenstance in most African countries suggest that one of the reason for continuing under development of our countries is our nonchalant attitude to time and the need for punctuality in all aspects of life. In the problematic of African time it was mentioned that one of the factors that grounded Nigeria Airways was the inability to keep to time schedules. According to the report several tardiness to time, led to withdrawal by Frankfurt of her landing certificate⁹. The problem of punctuality has become so endemic that lateness to any function is explained of as African time¹⁰.

In October 2007 an Ivorian campaign against African time backed by President 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 is *African time is killing Africa-lets fight it*. Reuters reported that organizers hope to heighten

awareness of how missed appointments meetings or even late buses cut productivity in a region where languid tardiness is the norm.

Similarly it was marked that legal adviser winner Narcissi *Aka-Who* received and 60,000 villa in recognition of his punctuality is so unusually good at being punctual that his colleagues call Mr. White Man's Time¹¹. By so doing African seems relaxed with African time perforation. The contract between African time and western time is illustrated in the award winning short film *Bonita and the great idea*¹² The protagonist of the film, a fisherman in a small village in Senegal could understand the new ideas brought back from Europe by his friend. These are symbolized by Swiss wristwatch which rings various times to the delight of the friends but no apparent reason. The fisherman is shown making his way through various ranks of officials with his ideas which in the end is a sharp criticism of western cultures, obsession with efficiency and progress. Hence many times there is a struggle with the western mathematical clock time for the scarce time available in which the individual or society will operate. The typical African today is polychromic than the western.

For the idea of keeping time, and coming early and life, organization is necessarily connected with the awareness of the future that one is meeting up with. The African traditional world includes the concern for the African, to enjoy a good re-incarnation or to be able to reach the home of the ancestors in the spirit world. All these concerns are futuristic and they have big implication for what they do here and now; in the rites; in the ways they conduct their life. There is lacuna in not developing effective time management and time saving devises which then could give people the elasticity the need to move from one activity to another and according to schedule too. The writer of problematic of African time was emphatic on this when he said that "the true value of African time is the disposition to give events the time they require to unfold and not try to force them through or sequestering as much time as necessary to get it done while other things wiat"¹³.

Time Management

Time management is the process of planning and exercising conscious control of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity¹⁴. Using time effectively gives the person choices on spending, managing activities at their own time and expediency. It is a Meta activity with the goal to maximize the overall benefit of a set of their activities within the boundaries conditions of a limited amount of time as time itself-cannot be managed because it is fixed. Time management may be aided by a range of skills, tools and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects and goals complying with a due date. Initially time management referred to just business or work activities but eventually the term broadened to include personal activities as well.

A time management system is a designed combination of processes, tools, techniques and methods. Time management is usually a necessity in any project development as it determines the project completion time and scope. The major themes arising from the literature on time management includes the following.

1. Creating an environment conducive to effectiveness.
2. Setting of priorities.
3. Carrying out activity around prioritization
4. The related process of reproduction of time spent on non priorities.
5. Incentives to modify behavior to ensure compliance with time- related deadlines.

Time management is related to different concepts such as project management, attention management and so on. Project management; Time management can be considered to be a project management subset and it is more commonly known as project planning and project scheduling. Time management has also been identified as one of the core functions identified in project management.

On the other side is attention management which relates to the management of cognitive resources and in particular the time that humans allocate their minds to conduct some activities. Organizational time management is the science of identifying, valuing and reducing cost wastage within organizational. It identifies, reports financially values and sustainable time, wasted time and effective time within an organization.

Onyeocha's Views

Onyeochas view on African time is a critical challenge on the popular conceptions of African time, the unexamined, unarticulated and pejorative ones. As a nuanced thinker he identified major standard conceptions of African time- the ethnical, the mechanical, the cosmic and the metaphysical. Onyeocha's ethics of African time dismisses its understanding and practice by people being behind schedule or coming late. Albeit, he comfortably emphasized his measure of discontent with this pejorative and derogatory African attitudinal perception and experience of time called African time¹⁵.

He emphatically stated that African time as a concept is a misnomer. When Laziness Lousiness and imprecision are allowed a place in time management, let no one think it is African time. According to Him, any form of time wasting, failure refusal or inability to keep to a present schedule is a travesty and not African time. When people say African Time in such circumstance it is as a reproach usually expressed with a tone of disdain.

The metaphysical concept of African Time is one in which tardiness, lousiness and a total disregard for schedules and programs is made out to characterize all African. Those that would use African Time as a pretext for tardiness miss the point. A renown writer Nath Ndiokwere complains that the travestied sense of African time was a foreign missionaries and African accommodated it in their Naivete¹⁶. He notes that there is no sufficient reason to blame them for the inability to overcome some of those circumstances beyond their control.

Onyeocha lay bare his thought when he stated clearly that the introduction of the mechanical clock and foisting of new religious and ethical values were at best confusing and at worst frustrating in agrarian communities life revolved around the means of production. People would rise at first light and head for farm and work for about four hours before having to content with the oppressive heat of the sun. They would then take some refreshment in the farm, unwind a little and head home before sundown. Panteleon pointed out that often times Africans are accused of being late comers. This is a view from the outside not totally correct it is due to an ignorance of, or a misunderstanding of the African relationship to time. Africans follow natural time. For Africans it is not a question of being late (Vis a- vis the clock) it is rather a matter of doing their own thing at their own natural time e.g. at sunset, or at sunrise. Africans follow the rhythm of nature, not the rush of the clock⁻¹⁷

The concept of African time is problematic since there is no separate cosmic space or horizon in which African Time as a special construct can be operational. Except as a metaphor, the concept is preposterous; it is both an insulting misnomer and an appalling counter value. Travestied African time is nothing but a disastrous failure in time management. Tardiness is a universal phenomenon deprecated by all. Because it can occur anywhere, it will not be fair or just for anyone to pretend that it has suddenly become an African stock in trade happening only among Africa.

Positive African Time as a Value

African time is a positive concept of quality time dedicated to the full accomplishment of a set activity or task. This implies that except in an emergency no new activity is allowed to interfere until the one at hand has been completed. Onyeocha cautioned that it will be unfair to think by implication that Africans are averse to multitasking¹⁸. The philosophy behind this is that one need to trade caution whenever extra tasks is embarked on. For Africa it is not all about how much but how well. African cultures are often described as

polychromic which means that people tend to manage more than one thing at a time rather than in a strict sequence¹⁹

Personal interactions and relationship are also managed in this way a different approach and set of priorities in managing tasks, events and interaction. Multi tasking as a value and a way of life belongs both in traditional society and in the industrialized and computerized world. In traditional society for instance, although people are urged to be focused and attentive in their activities yet there are ace drummers who produce fantastic rhythms. Furthermore, they are aware that even though the eyes and ears are double they could register only one thing at a time.

The traditional society ensures that one activity should be pursued to its logical conclusion at one given time. When that is accomplished, another activity could begin. Onyeocha concluded by saying that it is only in this manner that time could be arrested and used for a particular activity²⁰.

African Time as Kairotic

An African conception of time is *kairotic* for the fact that it almost invariably wrapped around operational pockets of events or activities²¹. The implication of this is that time is considered in wraps of events, the *time-within* –which an activity, or an event, an experience or action unfolds or accomplished²². According to Onyeocha African time is event time physical time, measureable natural time, scientific time²³.

Time seems to stand still or to drag on for someone that is idle, sick or in trouble; but for someone deeply engaged or struggling to meet a deadline, it seems to be flying,. The concept of time that would avoid the problems just mentioned must be *kairotic* and relative than linear and absolute. Even the bible has the relative conception of time as can be seen in Psalm 90:5: A thousand years are to you like yesterday, which has passed²⁴, like a watch of the night.

The African *kairotic* conception of time has a wider base and presents a more realistic picture than the linear conception of time. It gives time the relativity that is part of its definition, and makes it a useful tool to humans in their varying circumstances and dispositions rather than an absolute value. Individuals could then ply into its flow in the course of life and activity. Each of the world's seven billion persons could appropriate the twenty-four hours in the day for self-actualization even though the hours are available to everyone collectively. Thus, the same length of time can be too long for one person and too short for another because of their varying circumstances.

Similarly, some individuals achieve more while others achieve less within the same available unit of time. To be able to achieve more within a limited time requires either greater speed, or zeal, or zest or intensity, it could also require improved methods, greater efficiency, or multitasking. The industrialized societies outdo the more traditional societies in the area of speed, improved methods and multi-tasking, and these factors account for their greater productivity.

In African conception, time is almost invariably wrapped around operational pockets of events or activities. The true logic of positive "African Time" is that it reckons human activities not in terms of abstract mathematical duration *per se*, but in terms of the time required to accomplish it. Thus, it has no independent significance, but is meaningful only at the point of the event. That means that it is considered in wraps of events, the *time-within-which* an activity, or an event, an experience or an action unfolds or is accomplished.

The kairotic conception could explain the seemingly serenity and lack of fuss on the part of Africans and some other traditional cultures about keeping to mathematical time ie being tied to an abstract linear time frame. Mbiti affirmed this when he says that in the traditional African setting, time is a two dimensional phenomenon, with a long, past, a present and virtually no future²⁵.

This is contrary to linear time concept in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and future.

Remarks and Conclusion

The most conspicuous burden for Onyeocha was to elucidate means of distinguishing African conception of time and tardiness so to speak and distinction between the pejorative sense of African time and its more positive and potential fruitful use. Okere Pro captured it this way “with Aristotle, he defines Aims as the measure of motion according before and after. With Newton, he sees time as absolute, with Kant time is a condition of possibility of all perception in whitehead time is a process and in Einstein time is shown as relative. If time is further seen as relative to worldview, African world view defines time in a more fruitful sense. It is from here that Onyeocha goes to consider African time in the more positive sense.

It is no more new to emphasize the fact that Africa as a continent is a victim of single story. Africa is highly misunderstood in all ramifications. When one’s history is written by a foreigner what to one expect. It is obvious that such persons proper age will be changed, to the writers comfort, denied of any happy, condemned to any picture either as a blind or crippled and so on. Despite the fact that Africans have three other man types of time management, consciousness and measurement pejorative is the only gift for such.

Onyeocha’s effort to right this wrong is applauded. He is a master craftsman. Accordingly he has chiseled out a fine figure from an amorphous mass.

ENDNOTES

- ¹E. Ludwig (1950) *African idea of God*, E.W Smith ed London Edinburgh.
- ²I.Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time*, Imo University Press Owerri p 12.
- ³B.Harmuga A Companion (SIC) of the Western and African Concepts of time, Elderberry net retrieved 2016-04-20.
- ⁴G.Flaku: Taxas based Nigeria Filmmaker Explores Tardiness as cultural rift. Voanew.com retrieved 2016-04-18.
- ⁵M.Peter (2007) *Gives New Meaning of getting a house on time*. Reuters Retrieved 23 April 2014 p 18.
- ⁶Progress and Punctuality. Ghanaman Chronicle, Asian Africa Intelligence wire. May 17 204 retrieved on 2008-12-18.
- ⁷Murphy Peter 2007 page 22
- ⁸ Progress and Punctuality
- ⁹ Onyeocha (2012) page 14
- ¹⁰ C.Solomon: Michael S. Schell 2009-05-15 Managing Across cultures: The 7keys to doing business with a Global mindset. Books google.com retrieved 2016-04-13.
- ¹¹ Can African keep time BBC News 28 October 2003 retrieved 2008-02-18.
- ¹²Joash Macabuag. *Adjusting to African Time*. CNN com edition conn.com 2004-04-01 retrieved.
- ¹³ Can African keep time BBC News 28 October 2003 Retrieved 2008-02-18.
- ¹⁴ Onyeocha Izu page 18
- ¹⁵ Charlene Solomon 2009
- ¹⁶ Bert Hammiga 2016
- ¹⁷ Mbiti John (1969) *Africa Religion and Philosophy* London Heinemann
- ¹⁸ Achebe Chinua (1958) *Things fall apart England* Heinemann
- ¹⁹ Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time*, Imo University Press Owerri page 44.
- ²⁰Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time*, page 45
- ²¹Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time*, page 46
- ²²Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time*, page 47
- ²³Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time*, page 48
- ²⁴*The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition*, (New York: Doubleday) 1990.

REFERENCES

- Ludwig E., (1950) *African Idea of God*, E.W Smith ed London Edinburgh.
 Onyeocha I., (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time*, Imo University Press Owerri p 12.
 Bert H., A Companion (SIC) of the Western and African Concepts of time, Elderberry net retrieved 2016-04-20.

- Greg F., Texas Based Nigeria Filmmaker Explores Tardiness as Cultural rift. *Voanew.com Retrieved* 2016-04-18.
- Murphy P., (2007) *Gives New Meaning of getting a house on time. Reuters Retrieved* 23 April 2014 p 18.
- Progress and Punctuality. *Ghanaman Chronicle, Asian Africa Intelligence wire. May 17 204 Retrieved on* 2008-12-18.
- Murphy Peter 2007 page 22
- Progress and Punctuality
- Onyeocha (2012) page 14
- Charles S.M.S., Schell 2009-05-15 *Managing Across Cultures: The 7 keys to doing business with a Global mindset. Books google.com retrieved* 2016-04-13.
- Can African keep time BBC News 28 October 2003 *retrieved* 2008-02-18.
- Joash M., *Adjusting to African Time. CNN com edition conn.com* 2004-04-01 *retrieved.*
- Can African keep time BBC News 28 October 2003 *retrieved* 2008-02-18.
- Onyeocha Izu page 18
- Charlene Solomon 2009
- Bert Hammiga 2016
- Mbiti J., (1969). *Africa Religion and Philosophy London Heinemann*
- Achebe Chinua (1958). *Things fall apart England Heinemann*
- Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time, Imo University Press Owerri* page 44.
- Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time, page* 45
- Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time, page* 46
- Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time, page* 47
- Onyeocha (2012) *The Problematic of Africa time, page* 48
- The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition, (New York: Doubleday) 1990.*