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REVISITING JOHN MBITI'S AFRICAN RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHY (TIME AND FUTURE CONCEPTS): IT'S IMPACT ON THE LONG-TERM STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN NATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this paper is tom offer a critical review of literature by revisiting John S. Mbiti's African religions and philosophy on the concepts of time and the future and their impact on the long-term strategic development of African nations in the 21ˢᵗ century. **Design and Methodology:** This is a critical literature review. **Research limitations/ Implications:** The subject of revisiting John S. Mbiti's African religions and philosophy has not been fully researched in relation to strategic management. Consequently, there is limited literature on the subject. More research is needed in this subject to address the strategic development issues bedeviling African-Kenyan people. **Practical Implications:** This critical review shows that John Mbiti was among the pioneer African scholar immediately after Kenya gained her full independence. As a scholar he laid the precedence and foundation upon which interested development investors from within and outside the Kenyan country will rely. What worked and what did not work depended on what the pioneer scholars will say about their fellow Africans and until today how African Kenyans were and are perceived. They are perceived as people with no future focus and the reason why long-term strategic development may not take off. African-Kenyan development will only be possible in the 21ˢᵗ century through long-term planning, which is futuristic and embraces all the dynamic factors that are at play in the globalized world. **Originality/Value:** The paper fills the gap in the literature review in that early academic writings had lacked foresight as far as the current strategic planning on development matters are concerned. The concept of lack of the future, or at most its extension to encompass at most two years led to corruption, economic stagnation, poverty and misappropriation of national resources for individual or tribal gains.

INTRODUCTION

Poncian and Mgaya (2015) argue that Africa continues to face serious development challenges despite recent record in growth. Such challenges as dependency, corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure and production sectors, and leadership and governance are some of the impediments to Africa's quest for sustainable and equitable development. They argue in their paper that the current poverty and underdevelopment of Africa has much to do with enabling conditions created by African leaders and they propose that addressing this requires Africans to go back to pre-colonial history where they can tap the good lessons rather than continuing importing Western based models which may not necessarily fit into Africa's unique characteristics. Though Poncian and Mgaya (2015) are of the idea that African go back to pre-colonial period, the current review of literature sees the contradiction that was brought by John s. Mbiti. Mbiti contended that African-Kenyans did not have the future. Basing this critical review on this ground, it means going back to pre-colonial period, means getting embedded into the traditional structures of primitivity, backwardness and lack of focus.

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Organization's vision and Mission: Athapaththu's (2016) work determined that the mission and the objectives of an organization are very important to be understood because they are current situation and the types of barriers the firm is facing from the existing and potential environment determines their realization. Athapaththu (2016) opined that strategic planning requires a great deal of strategic thinking as one of the most important management tool which helps managers to recognize the vision and mission of the organization. Athapaththu (2016) recognizes thinking as a tool of mission and vision development. Prof. John Mbiti did not recognize this human capacity of thinking and did not know that without some believe each recognizing subject could know only by itself and would be forced continually to start from scratch, because there will be no possibility to receive knowledge and human collaboration in its advancement (Monika, 2008). Indeed it is true that one can not engage in the steps of strategic management process without having the concept of "time and future in the mind".

According to William's (2012) work, the results indicate that most employees have first-hand knowledge of the vision and mission statements though they do not frequently come across them and their knowledge of the components and perceptions about ownership (of the vision and mission) are low. Denton's (2006) work showed that the system of work one designs dictates how successful he/she will be. According to Collins and Porras (1994) as noted by Denton (20060, in their book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies,* they made a strong case for managerial vision as a critical factor for separating highly successful and mediocre companies. The integration and alignment of individual goals with the goals of the organization helps to achieve the big picture.

Denton (2006) quote Campell and Alaxander (1997) who wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* that most firms are unsuccessful at implementing effective strategies than formal planning processes. The authors gave reason for this due to a lack of understanding about the difference between purpose and constraints. The purpose of the organization refers to 'what it exists to do' and constraints are what an organization 'must do in order to survive'. The organizational purpose or sense of identity should be unique as far as possible so that the organization stands out viable for all to see. Warnock (2000) says that vision is seeing a desired future situation. Warnock (2000) acknowledges Jean-Paul Sartre who said that when talking about art, religion, science, social structures and politics, he defined vision as the ability to think of what is not. Manasse (1985) quote Kouzes amd Posner (1984) who said exemplary leaders imagine an existing, attractive and focused future for their organization. They dream of making a difference. They have a vision of what may be, and they believe they can make it happen. Manasse (1985) says vision becomes a guide or a road-map to a better future. According to Hickman and Silva (1984), Mannasse (1985) says, vision is a mental journal from the known to the unknown, creating the future from a montage of current facts, hopes, dreams, dangers and opportunities. Vision is the force which molds meaning for the people of the organization. Manasse (1985) in his conclusion he defines '*organizational vision*' as based on a systems perspectives, assumes that the parts of who are dependent to each other, and that their behavior can best be understood in terms of their relationship to their context and their connections.

Organizational vision enables leaders to put systems in place that create the capacity for higher pay-off in relationship to their vision. Manasse (1985) says that '*future vision*' is a comprehensive picture of how an organization will look at some point in the future, including how it will be positioned it its environment and how it will function internally. Future vision incorporates the systems perspective of organizational vision (which means future vision is superior to organizational vision), available information about expected developments, and the personal values and believes of a leader. Synthesizing an appropriate direction for an organization requires intuitive as well as rational processes, plus the exercise of moral imagination in the selection of alternative conception of goodness. Leaders rely heavily on symbols, metaphors, models and interpersonal competence in conveying their vision to their organization.

Traditional African-Kenyan culture and vision formation: The culture of a people/or nation determines significantly how it makes choices for its vision and long-term strategies. Mbiti's six months to two years future/vision may have been informed by his cultural background which is not the case of the 21st century strategists. Any culture has its own knowledge. At the epistemological level, knowledge helps to make facts clear, thus having an understood vision for the organization. The government of a particular place, in regard to its unique vision identity, has the role now and for the future to develop knowledge- based economies that are strategic and sustainable (Grey and David, 2002). Grey and David (2002) argue that if knowledge-based economies are to be developed, then more images about the future need to be accomplished.

Andre and Christopher (2005) sought to identity leadership demands and possible courses of development. In their findings, Andre and Christopher (2005), the results demonstrated a shift in practice in leadership from more traditional approaches to more innovative, collaborative approaches. Basing their comparison of non-US with US data, it showed that non-US populations expect more innovative leadership approaches/philosophies in the future. In regard to Mbiti's (1970) assertion regarding the near future of 6 months to 2 years, there needs to be a shift form uncompetitive traditional society into the present competitive and dynamic society. For in uncompetitive society, there was no need to worry about the distance future. This shift also includes a shift in practice and leadership style as lightly put by Andre and Christopher (2005). Wilfrid (1971) argues that scholars speak of African traditional religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own religious system. Wilfrid (1971) says that "African philosophy" refers to the understanding, attitude of the mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African people think, act or speak in different situations in life. Therefore, the author of this paper agrees with this assertion that Mbiti thought, acted and spoke in the period of life when Christian evangelization and higher knowledge about the same was taking root in the Kenyan land. Wilfrid (1971) further argues that the speed of casting off the scales of traditional life is much greater than the speed of wearing garments of this future dimension of life. The illusion lies in the fact that these two entirely processes are made or look identical. This is lack of distinction between the two types of processes remain in all spheres of modern African life, and so long as it remains, the situation will continue to be unstable if not dangerous. Present structures of political, economic, educational and church life

unfortunately favour the continuation, if not the perpetuation, of this illusion. Here then lies the dilemma and tragedy of the rapid change in Africa. According to Wilfrid (1971) assertions, it is true that what is witnessed in African's political, economical, educational and church life spheres in the 21th century. There is no stable and continuous structure to support these spheres of life. Leaders in any sphere of life act as if there are no tomorrow by engaging in short-term gains (because of the belief in the immediate future or no future, either in public office, private office or non office holders). As such they knowingly engage in corruption, assassination, killings, cheating, and manipulation of information or court cases to let them stay in a state of present illusion and avoid the blurred future. Borrowing from the religious eschatology, the notion of the messianic hope, or a final destruction of the world, has no place in the traditional concept of their history. African peoples have no belief in progress because the idea that the development of human activities and achievements moving from a low to a higher degree is not clear to them (Wlifrid, 1971). In regard to this assertion, it still remains a contradiction to African present minds, 'why progress if the final destruction of the world is sure to come'.

Traditional African philosophy and knowledge: Benjamin (1972) says that like other authors, Mbiti indicates that traditional Africa has no concept of time as an ongoing process stretching forward into an infinite future. Benjamin (1972) argues that Mbiti's picture of the African concept of time as a futureless dimension perpetually sliding backward into an irrecoverable past is thus a total misrepresentation. Benjamin (1972) argues that part of the problem is that Mbiti fails to recognize the important dimension of ritual time. Time as noted by Shelton among the Igbo, is essentially cynical, not linear, and it is eminently recoverable (Benjamin, 1972). In strategic management, any activity falls in the eminent recoverable time, the reason why we have strategy evaluation to review the progress, retrogress and lessons learned from implementing strategies. Any activity is time bound, beyond this, evaluation is carried out. Sabrina (2011) quoting Oruka (1990), who said that according to African traditional society, there were prophets and sages who would foretell about the future and offer knowledge and guidance to people in general. Sabrina (2011) cites Oruka (1990) who drew examples as he talked about Elija Masinde, a famous prophet of Kenya from the Luhyia community who died in 1978. Elijah Masinde had predicted that the European colonialist will disappear from Kenya relinquishing their power and that black culture and religion will once again be able to regain their strength in Kenya.

According to Sabrina's (2011) claims, it is true that Kenya gained her independence in 1963 and soon later the black culture and religion once again was able to regain their traditional strength in the independent Kenya. This means that Mbiti's assertion of immediate or non-future and the distance past events and history became the common phenomenon. This is the belief in no progress, dilemma and tragedy of rapid change for Africa as examined by Wilfrid (1971) and became the true testimony for independent Kenya. To this end, there was lack of progressive continuity and strategy sustainability of the development agenda as initiated by the colonialists but greatly discontinued by the successor regime. Sabrina (2011) agrees with Oruka (1990) that a person is a sage in the philosophic sense only in the extent that he is consistently concerned with the fundamental ethical and empirical issues

and questions relevant issues pertinent to the society and his ability to offer insightful solutions to some of those issues. Accordingly, one cannot offer solutions if he/she does not have the future in mind. The future dictates the sage philosopher and thinker to decipher concretely the right solutions to issues that may arise. In regard to sage philosophy and in consideration of Mbiti's African philosophy and Religion, the author of this article argues that, strategic planning is equal to sage philosophy's contention but limited as far as Mbiti's African Philosophy and Religion is concerned. This means that, though an African sage thinks about the future, this future is short-term according to Mbiti. Thus the African strategic planner has the insightful knowledge of the present and past situation of the society that enables him/her to came up with probable solutions to mitigate the uncertain and dynamic environment in the near future of the society. Newell (1975) argues that in Western Culture, time seems to be thought generally as a line extending equally into the past and future, marked off in units of hours, days, years and centuries. However, Newell (1975) notes that there appears to be some uncertainty as to whether time "moves" or whether human beings move through time; at any rate, there is an agreement that in some sense we are headed towards the future. Man plan, work and struggle in order that the future may be better than the past. Newell (1975) argues that Dr. John Mbiti stimulated considerable debate by suggesting that in Africa there is a strong sense of the past and present but the 'future is virtually absent'. Mbiti supports this view with evidence from his own language- Kikamba saying that while it is possible to speak of distance past, one can only speak of a limited future, stretching to about six months, and in any case, not beyond two years from now (Newell, 1995).

Kimmerle (1988) argues by citing the philosophy of African by Wiredu and Hountondji who analyzed the Akano people's philosophy and proverb—which said there are no crossroads in the ear, is the Akano formulation of the principle of non-contradiction. Aphorisms as the pursuit of benevolence brings no evil on him who pursuits it. Socrates maxim "no one willingly does wrong, or "virtues is knowledge". The author contends that if the present strategists plan well with the right intention and interest the organization rightly achieves her objectives and individual people within the organization will satisfy their needs.

Practical implications for revisiting John S. Mbiti's African religions and philosophy: John Mbiti's African Philosophy and religion treated time and the future on the level of events witnessed (believed) and not understood at the level of knowledge, judgment and finally development of insights. It would therefore be impossible for the 21st African strategists, who have little grasp of what epistemology is to come up with ideas whose origin is not only believe but something tested and verified and whose effect is long lasting. The future is immediate or at most 6 months to two years and is uncertain (Mbiti, 1971). Ana (2004) argues that this is hypothetical because planning is based on some hypothesis about the future and seeks to invent the future that suits the organization (Munoz, 1999). Ana (2004) still quote Rodrigo and Rfin (19970) who said that planning is designing the future, leaving a written record of such design to guide the behavior of those who integrate the organization, so that the future does not develop arbitrarily but in the way it was planned; that is force the evolution of events so that what happens is what you want to happen.

The author of this review is of the idea that Mbiti's future which is virtually absent is a great concern for the strategic planners. For African Kenyans, government workers need to work hard and design the future on a written record that the subsequent leaders/planners ought to follow if development is to be realized step by step and progressively. Supporting Ana (2004), Paul (2010) argues in the findings that forcing someone to work or think in a specific way may achieve successful short-term goals. However, short-termism is rarely the answer and leaders will achieve far more by considering the long term. Here, Paul (2010) is warning African leaders and strategic planners to put emphasis on the long-term planning for it has more positive effect to the nation than-short-termism which is oriented toward egocentric opportunities. Paul (2010) in his conclusion, he say that, any organization wanting to achieve long-term results needs to be able to build a series of short-term relationships that revolve around helping people make meaningful contributions and gaining useful knowledge and skills that can be used even beyond the current job preparation for succession of leadership is a prerequisite for long-term strategic planning, being consistent with the completion of the processor's project before initiating new ones. Through proper succession planning, resources are rightly used, targets achieved and overall sustainable development is guaranteed.

Succession is the process through which plans are made to hand over leadership on retirement of the old guard, upon death, sacking and summary dismissal. Susan's (2009) study found out that there is little literature on organization, deep succession planning. Susan (2009) says that the process of succession needs to be linked to organizational objectives with ownership at all levels. The political succession in Africa has been a serious issue that no leaders in office want to surrender power freely. The reason being leaders do not know what the future holds for them. To some, power is a weapon to achieve their short-term objectives, but not really that of the country.

Allan (2014) noted that many talent management practitioners today would agree that the succession planning processes in their organizations are limited in their effectiveness. Allan (2014) gives factors for limited effectiveness as follows; a lack of focus on the future capabilities needed; inconsistencies in the implementation of processes designed limited system integration of talent and succession planning efforts, with other key human resource and business processes; and lack of accountability for making decisions and ensuring they are fully executed. Allan (2014) quotes Dowell (2010) who noted that total management professionals are charged with helping the organization set the strategy and create an end-to-end pipeline for talent needed to lead to the future in business. It is important to have tools and processes in place to identify and develop the leadership pipeline for both short-term and long-term (Allan, 2014). David and Carly (2002) in regard to government's long-term planning, cite Bernal (1969) who argued that the cardinal tendency of progress is the replacement of an indifferent chance environment by a deliberately created one. For example, David and Carly (2002) argue that in the fall of 2001, NASA approached the Foresight and Government project at the Wilson Center with a fascinating challenge could the stimulate the government to think out 50 years and set a series of a long-term goals. Because most governments and businesses, 50 years is eternity, reaching far beyond the normal planning, budgeting and business cycles. But for NASA, 50 years just begins to stretch the imagination, given their 200 year plan that envisions for the first interstellar human mission to a neighbouring solar system by 2200. In conclusion David and Carly (2002) say that it is the role and responsibility of government in preparing for uncertain future and it's the society's commitment to foresight in general. If no institution in government is explicitly tasked to think about long-term future, or if foresight functions in government or society go unheeded, the future is free to surprise us in painful ways--- our policy makers need to understand that the future provides more than rhetorical ploy for public speeches, it provides a sanctuary for reflection and democratic process in a rapidly changing world.. "We have a choice; to live in a world constrained by inevitability, or a world framed by possibility.

Long-term strategic planning includes forecasting of the future. Sohail's (2012) work found out that methodologies that forecast the long-term future are likely to be more rewarding in terms of the quality, insight and validity if they are eclectic and layered, go back in times as far as they go into the future, that contextualize critical factors and long-term projections through a nuanced reading of macro-history, and focus on epistemic change, the ruptures that records how we know the world.

Sohail's (2012) work gave a summary of the findings of a comparative analysis of methodological approaches for forecasting the long-term as follows;

- Values become increasing important as we move from the short-term to the long-term. Probable tends to give way to the preferred.
- The long-term raises tensions between continuity and discontinuity. Certain methods forecast novelty while others assert that plus a change.
- Methodology exists in a policy context. As important as to how we do what we do, is what we do with our results.
- What one sees is based on where one stands. The type of forecasts one selects is based on our views on the nature of space and time.
- The nature of the future is how one sees the present as desired or undesired.
- Forecasts are linked to one's social biography and status.
- Critical factors tend to fall into the dichotomies of growth versus distribution and extensive versus intensive.
- Generally, epistemes are outside our knowing efforts, thus far more scenarios are required.
- Multi-methodological frameworks are required. No single methodology is adequate.
- The most rewarding framework is likely to be a complex combination of eclectic interactive, macro-historical and epistemic. This approach is historical with contending descriptions or reality and multi levels of analysis.

The author of this critical review supports Sohail's (2012) work and Henrik (2016) who found out that strategic forecasting is as a rebirth of a long-range planning albeit with new methods and theories. Firms should make the building of strategic forecasting capability a priority. Ingrid's (2000) work reported that the results of an empirical study investigating the key factors that affected the survival of large manufacturing organizations between 1982 and 1993 in Australia. Four broad categories of variables were examined: environmental

variables, organizational variables, company strategies and ownership characteristics. Using logistic regression analysis, it was found that the following variables are significant for company long-term survival; size, planning system, corporate direction, research and development and ownership characteristics (Susan, 2009). Simon (2011) in his study of the seven strategic missteps and how to avoid them, on his third misstep; 'the strategy focuses only on the short'. Simon (2011) says that a strategy focus on creating value over the planning horizon. But in most organizations, the strategic horizon is less than five years, which is at best medium term. Actions taken based only on a short-term horizons risk sending organizations into a tactical spiral in which they fail to invest time in developing new capabilities to build new bases for advantage. Further, Simon (2011) gave a remedy to short-term strategy posing the question; What is preventing us from thinking long-term?. The author is of the view that the solution to long-term strategic thinking lies in the vision formation and the analysis of the 'Zamani'/past events according to John Mbiti. This is a kind of indispensable and inalienable link between the past (zamani) and the future. The stand-point (hinge) being the present where we are.

The shift also entails making hard decisions through brain-storming, which more often than not is a difficult exercise. Michael (1999) quoted Machievelli 15th century, who said that 'there is nothing neither more difficult for success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. That is, a new order of thinking from the short-term decision making to long-term strategic planning. Jan-Peter, Adrian and John (2009) are of the idea that it is time to give an account of the practical experiences to date, reflect on implications for the continued development of more general governance concepts and anticipate possible future pathways for long-term policy debate. Jan-Peter et al., (2009) understood long-term policy design as the development and implementation policy strategies that seek to change radically key societal structures. In transition management terms, long-term policies help innovate new social-technical systems of provisions, rather than optimize and correct existing systems at the margins. The realization of long-term policy goals extends well beyond electoral cycles and management terms, even beyond a generation of civil servants. Over the course of long-term change processes, policies have to interact with transformative changes as they unfold long-term policy designs thus needs to be flexible and adaptive, it has to cope with the inherent uncertainties in unclear pathways of societal change.

Quinsey (1942) argues that current civilization has seen the application of long-term planning on various activities. Institutions, communities, business organizations, and nations have successfully applied the principle of efficient and effective development. Jennifer, William and Bruce (2007) explored the relationship between ethical values and individual's long-term orientation. Jennifer et al (19420 define long-term orientation as the degree to which one plans for and considers the future, as well as values the traditions of the past (learning from yesterday). Carrying out a research on the future strategic planning of the public sector, Theodore (2010) argued that though it has become orthodox/tradition practice in the public sector over the past 25 years, strategic planning will need to play a more critical role in 2020 than it does at present if public managers are to anticipate and manage skillfully and address new issues that seem to emerge with increasing rapidity.

Conclusion

In this paper the author argues that what lacked among the African (Kenyans) of Mbiti's time, was the intellectual acumen of doing the steps of strategic planning as we know them today. And it is true that the business environment under which Mbiti did his work was immediately after Kenyan independence from the British colonial rule. Which means that most of the African-Kenyans could not be judged as lacking entrepreneurial skills and the enthusiasm for they were still recovering from the shocks of colonialism. But today, we have African-Kenyans who would actually do the steps of strategic planning and follow the strategic management process (situation analysis, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation) in the development endeavour.

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