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## 6. INTERROGATING THE CONCEPT OF TIME AMONG THE SHONA

*A Postcolonial Discourse*

### INTRODUCTION

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) cover an array of fields from anatomy through astronomy to zoology. IKS have always provided the basis of decision making in different African communities. These knowledge systems are also embedded within specific cultural contexts, thus, lending themselves a plural character. African perspectives on the concept of time are somewhat similar to those prevalent in the Western world, but the two also differ in some important respects. Western concepts of time, for example, are in some instances characterized by specificity as these extensively rely on gadgets used to measure and tell time such as clocks, chronometers and the calendar. Western time tends to be clock bound and creates a mechanical time consciousness. On the other hand, African indigenous concepts of time tend to be somewhat elastic. This is due to the presence of a wide vocabulary, in African communities, related to time that expresses time in both specific and elastic terms. In the vocabulary, there are terms to refer to both larger and smaller units of time. However, in some instances, there is an absence of specificity on the time referred to. Time, then tends to be elastic. Time, in the African perspective, can be located within a range of, say, one to three hours in the Western sense. It is important to note that the concept of time, in the former, is closely related to seasons and events in the local environment. In indigenous African communities astronomy is also related to the concept of time. Consequently, the presence of certain stars during the night is associated with certain time periods.

This chapter seeks to interrogate the African indigenous perspective on concepts of time, in general, but more specifically, from a Shona perspective. This is premised on three claims. Firstly, we posit that indigenous Africans in general and the Shona (the largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe) in particular have a concept of time; secondly, time, according to the Shona, is not 'dead' but is functional, symbolic as well as sacred. Lastly, we argue that post-colonial African and Shona society in particular has a lot to learn from indigenous African conceptions of time.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is informed by a micro theory, which is symbolic interactionism, in this case. In terms of symbolic interactionism, human beings act on the basis of meanings that arise out of the process of interaction (Henslin, 2003; Schaefer, 2003; Macionis, Jansson, & Benoit, 2012). These meanings guide and influence subsequent interactions. Language is a significant symbol which plays an important part in human interaction as people interact on the basis of shared meaning. According to Mead in Ritzer (2009), one of the things that language, or significant symbols generally, does is call out the same response in the individual as it does in others. This implies that language is used on the basis of shared meaning. This makes human communication and interaction possible. Indigenous concepts of time are embedded in language. Different concepts of time are to be found in all languages. Mead has argued that language is a significant symbol as people use it on the basis of shared meaning (Schaefer, 2003). In the process of interaction the different concepts of time embedded in language convey shared meaning among the participants and this makes social order a possibility.

#### DEFINITION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

In order to appreciate the concept of indigenous knowledge systems, it is important to discuss the concept of culture. At the very basic level, culture can be defined as a way of life for a given people. Ndura (2004) in Ndura (2006:2) defines culture as “the acquired complex knowledge that individuals and communities use to affirm and interpret the values, beliefs, customs and practices that distinguish them from other people and groups in society.” Taylor in Bennet (2003) states that culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of society. Finally, Ngara (1991) cited in Viriri (2003) says that culture is the expression of people’s social activities in relation to their struggle and with human forces that threaten their survival or their way of life. Cultures are born in the struggle to survive and to conquer nature and assist in human survival. From these definitions, it is apparent that culture provides individuals with a blueprint that offers solutions in the interaction with both the physical and social environments. Culture represents people’s attempts to conquer nature and come to terms with it. Indigenous concepts of time are also part of culture. These concepts provide the foundation of decision making as people deal with their environments. Matowanyika (1995) argues that culture is an important repository for knowledge gained. Therefore, indigenous knowledge systems are located within a certain cultural context and knowledge systems are also embedded within particular cultural contexts. It needs to be appreciated that culture is not homogenous even for people of the same society and this brings diversity to the fore. Thus, indigenous knowledge systems exist in plural forms in a number of societies. Chambers (1983) posits that rural knowledge and indigenous knowledge systems exist in many forms among innumerable groups of people in innumerable environments.

The importance of culture can be appreciated by considering its functions. Mazrui (1990) in Ndolera (2005) cited by Nyoni and Nyoni (2010) identifies seven functions of culture and argues that culture provides people with: lenses of perception and cognition; motives of behaviour; criteria for evaluation, a basis of identity; a mode of communication; a basis of stratification and a system of consumption and production. Indigenous African concepts of time tend to perform all the functions outlined above. Babalola and Alokun (2013) posit that Africans conceive the time concept as a socio-cultural reality in the realm of people's philosophical scholarship. Fabiyi and Oloukoi (2013) concur and state that in Africa, traditional or local knowledge is strongly linked to local culture and past experiences.

The concept of indigenous knowledge systems has been defined in numerous ways. Masoga (2007) is of the view that indigenous knowledge systems refer to knowledge and technologies around communities indigenous to a particular space and context. Nwonwu (2008) says that indigenous knowledge is essentially local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Mazonde and Thomas (2007) argue that indigenous knowledge systems refer to knowledge and technologies around communities indigenous to a particular space and context. Maurial (1999) in Hart (2010) defines indigenous knowledge as people's cognitive and wise legacy as a result of their interaction with nature in a common territory. Finally, Kibuka-Sebitosi (2008) states that the ILO Convention Number 169 (1991) defines indigenous knowledge as that knowledge that is held by a people who identify themselves as indigenous to a place based on a combination of cultural distinctiveness, and prior territorial occupancy relative to a more recently arrived population that has its own distinctive culture. These different definitions of indigenous knowledge have a common theme. They can be seen as localized forms of knowledge that have provided people with solutions as they interact with their environment. In reality they are the basis for local-level decision making in virtually all aspects of human life, including agriculture, healthcare, food preparation, education, natural resource management and cultural and traditional activities (Nwonwu, 2008). The indigenous African concept of time is located in the context of indigenous knowledge systems. These concepts of time have provided solutions to challenges encountered in interacting with both the physical and social environments.

Colonialism has had a negative effect on indigenous knowledge systems (Hart, 2010; Chambers, 1983; Bhebe, 2000; Shizha, 2013). According to Shizha (2013), the advent of colonization in Sub-Saharan Africa brought in foreign knowledges, the so-called 'scientific knowledge' that devalued IKS as unscientific, untried and untested for education and social development. In the context of indigenous concepts of time, the advent of colonialism introduced reliance on western gadgets of measuring time in the form of watches, although indigenous concepts of time are still a vital resource in a number of communities. Walker (2004) cited in Hart (2010) is of a similar opinion and states that the marginalization or blinding of indigenous worldviews has been and continues to be one of the major tools of colonization. In the context of the time concept, Babalola and Alokun (2013) posit that the

enlightened and the educated among the people see in western education, a better way of time consideration. Chambers (1983) has also observed that the colonizing force of outsiders' knowledge is programmed to override and bury other paradigms and to impose its own. No wonder some scholars have summarized the objective of colonialism as cultural imperialism.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SHONA CONCEPT OF TIME

Mbiti has argued that for Africans time has two dimensions: a past and a present (Beyaraza, 2000; Parker, 2006; Kalumba, 2008; Babalola & Alokun, 2013). To Mbiti, African time does not project into the future. This position is debatable given that even in terms of language, for example, in the Shona language in Zimbabwe, there is vocabulary that points into the future as will be illustrated later in the chapter. Therefore, time is a continuum, and it is the African understanding of this that enables them to conceive of both near and distant future events and live with the hope of seeing these fulfilled (Beyaraza, 2000). There is also need to underline the fact that there is a difference between Western and indigenous African concepts of time. Okembe and Imani (2012) argue that Africans collectively, and certainly historically, before the advent of the Western science narrative and discourse, did not live in the conceptual world of Eurocentric time and space. This is also clearly shown in the characteristics of the concept of time in indigenous African communities. Indigenous African perspectives on time have several characteristics. These characteristics tend to be shared with other societies in so far as time is concerned. Time is associated with events (Beyaraza, 2000; Babalola & Alokun, 2013). Events that occur in the different communities can be used as a reference point. These events also include those taking place in nature. Babalola and Alokun (2013) argue that Africans are conscious of the environment and the nature around them and reality as a whole, including the awareness of the Divine. As a result, time is tied to events that occur in the community as well as in nature. In the Zimbabwean case, in the Shona language, months of the year have certain names that are also tied to events taking place in nature. Such events signal the advent or even end of a certain time period.

It is also important to note that time is considered to be sacred. For instance, there are certain periods in the year when certain activities are prohibited. Consider the burial of a deceased person. The burial has to be conducted at a particular time. Africans have a sense of the sacred and a sense of mystery. There is high reverence for sacred places, persons and objects. Similarly, sacred times are also celebrated. For example, the seasonal cycles and stages of life are sanctified by ritual action. Rites of initiation, of purification of individuals or communities and of consecration are widespread. To Africans, life has a festive dimension and is thus celebrated in appropriate seasons or times. Among the Shona, for example, there are sacred rituals at birth, adulthood, marriage and death (Aschwaden, 1982).

A measure of time such as age is an essential part of social life. Old folk are held in high esteem to the extent of the strong belief that since they have seen more of the days (light), they are able to give direction for living in the circumstances of the present day; their wisdom is therefore regarded as prophetic (sacred). Sacredness of time in the African perspective is also observed by setting aside of days referred to as *chisi* (resting day). These are days on which members of different communities are not expected to engage in farming or burial activities. They are days of rest that give the local administrators time to transact activities, like conducting village court business and ritual activities. If a member of the community decides to deviate from this norm, one is expected to pay a fine for deviance. The choice of day to set aside as *chisi* in a community rests with the respective traditional leaders who are also highly revered. Sacredness of time from the African perspective also extends to the issue of taboos. For instance, it is taboo for one to marry or perform rituals during the month of *Mbudzi* (November) because of the thunder and lightning that might strike the gathered crowd to witness the ceremony. It is also taboo to perform orature such as children's games, folktales, idioms and riddles during summer and autumn seasons. In light of that, one can conclude that the Shona regard time as sacred. That is also reflected in some aspects of their language.

#### SHONA LANGUAGE AND TIME

Time is too abstract a concept to be fully grasped cognitively, thus Fulga (2012) considers the different strategies of a language to be very useful in representing time. In the same vein, Babalola and Alokun (2013) observe that the vivid use of language with reference to time is unique. It follows then that the Shona language has its unique way of conceptualizing and characterizing time. For Shona speakers, the concept of time helps to bring out their beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life. Their referencing of time is therefore determined by the linguistic and cultural influences these speakers are exposed to while growing up. This is buttressed by Babalola and Alokun (2013) who opine that time is a socio-philosophical conception that is part of the identity of a people. Baroditsky (2011) concurs by echoing that how people conceptualize time appears to depend on how the languages they speak tend to talk about time. For that reason, time herein is discussed in the context of the cultural thought system and language of the Shona people.

In the Shona language, time is best described as being linear and three-dimensional, although it is also cyclic. Contrary to Mbiti's conclusion on the African concept of time, the Shona consider time in the perspective of the past, present and future. There is spatial progression from the past, through the present into the future. The Shona language has words, grammatical forms, constructions and expressions that refer directly to the three broad categories of time. These various ways of portraying time in the Shona language are explored below.

### *Verbal Tenses and Gradations of Time*

The Shona language grammaticalizes the concept of time using tense to distinguish between the past, present and future (Mashiri & Warinda, 2010). Time reference is therefore marked on verbs using morphemic markers. Mpofu-Hamadziripi, Ngunga, Mberi and Matambirofa (2013, p. 188) note, “Tense, like many other aspects of language, originates from the extra-linguistic notion of time and its perception as operational through a lineal, forward-looking motion.” In simple linguistic terms, this assertion means that time translates into what is commonly referred to as tense. In the Shona language of time, tense is bound together with the verbal morphology and/or category as Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al. (2013) assert. The verb is the nucleus around which all the other inflections or morphemes gather.

When time is mapped into the Shona language, the reference point of the tense is always now—which is the present. The backward movement of time is marked by tense signs that are a continuum of the past; the here and now of time is encoded by the present or continuous tenses, while the times ahead are represented by a continuum of future tenses (Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al., 2013). Both the past and future tenses are further characterized by two tense markers each—the near and the far. This indicates that in Shona, time is elastic since tense is not demarcated in a strict way like westerners would do using a chronometer. Rather, time and tense are used in broad terms that are widely understood by Shona speakers. Through tense marking, as mentioned earlier, the Shona language delineates time into three broad categories, namely: past, present and future. These are illustrated and explained below.

The past time has two degrees that are labelled as the recent and the remote past. The recent past refers to actions or states that would have occurred before what Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al. (2013) term the linguistic *now*. The recent past actions and states are understood to have taken place on the day of speaking or writing (Mashiri & Warinda, 2010). Such actions and states are encoded by the morphemic marker **-a-** as in the following illustrations:

- *Nd-a-taura naye* (I have spoken to her/him)
- *V-a-nyora bvunzo* (They have written the examination)

In contrast from the recent past, the remote past locates those actions and states prior to the day of speaking or writing. The remote past “hypothetically goes back to time infinite” (Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al., 2013, p. 190). This period of time is denoted by the morphemic marker **-ka-** as exemplified below:

- *Nda-ka-taura naye* (I spoke to her/him)
- *Va-ka-kanyora bvunzo* (They wrote the examination)

The present tense, as alluded to earlier, marks the linguistic *now*, which is basically the time of speaking or writing. The present tense is simply the *now*. It is denoted by the distinctive markers **-ri** and **-no-** as in the following pairs:

- *Ndi-ri kutaure naye* (I am speaking to her/him)
- *Va-ri kunyora bvunzo* (They are writing the examination)
- *Ndi-no-taura naye* (I speak to her/him)
- *Va-no-nyora bvunzo* (They write examinations)

The present tense **-no-** is that which Mberi (2002) cited in Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al. (2013, p. 191) refers to as the “indefinite present tense” or simply the present continuous. Besides **-ri** and **-no-** as morphemic markers denoting the present tense, Fortune (1977) also adds the present stative **-ka-** as another indication of the linguistic now. Fortune argues that **-ka-** refers to a state presently obtaining relative to the time of speech or writing. This is reflected in the following constructions:

- *A-ka-naka* (She is beautiful/He is handsome)
- *A-ka-reba* (S/he is tall)

The third gradation of time in Shona, the future tense, points at actions and states that occur subsequent to the linguistic now. Just like the past, the future time has two tense markers—the immediate future and the distant future, also referred to as the near future and far future respectively. Mashiri and Warinda (2010) concur with Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al. (2013) that the morphemic marker for the near/immediate future is **-o-** as in:

- *Nd-o-taura naye* (I am about to speak to her/him)
- *V-o-nyora bvunzo* (They are about to write the examination)

The distant/far future is marked by the morpheme **-cha-** as illustrated in the following verbal constructions:

- *Ndi-cha-taura naye* (I will speak to her/him)
- *Va-cha-nyora bvunzo* (They will write the examination)

#### *Nominal Constructions as Adverbs of Time*

Adverbs of time are strategies employed by the Shona language to indicate the recentness and/or remoteness of time. In concurrence with Chimhundu and Chabata (2007), Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al. (2013, p. 111) define adverbs of time as constructions which “... tell us when an action happens, happened, will happen or is due to happen, as well as its frequency and duration.” Basically, adverbs of time are nominal constructions which answer to the question “When?” ‘When’ is synonymous with time. The following is a list of nouns that function as adverbs of time, some of which have been adopted and adapted from Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al. (2013):

- *nhasi/nyamashi/nyamusi* (today);
- *mangwana* (tomorrow);
- *nezuro/zuro* (yesterday);
- *marimwezuro/marumwezuro/zona* (the day before yesterday);

- *kusweramangwana* (the day after tomorrow);
- *hwedza* (tomorrow);
- *makeyi* (last year).

Chimhundu and Chabata (2007) note that, seasons of the year can also function as adverbs of time still answering to the question “When?” as in:

- *muchando* (in winter);
- *muzhizha* (in summer);
- *muchirimo* (in autumn).

#### *Figurative Referencing of Time*

There is extensive employment of figurative language by the Shona in referencing time. Use of idioms and proverbs also indicates how the Shona conceptualize time. The figurative expressions below show how conscious the Shona are of time.

- *Kuita bete rawira mumukaka* (This refers to one who does not return from an assignment or journey in time).
- *Kuita kwakaenda imbwa ndiko kwakaenda tsuro* (To never return with feedback when sent to make a follow up on someone or on something).
- *Kuendera dzama semadora* (To disappear for sometime before re-surfacing).
- *Chinono chinengwe bere rakadya richifamba* (Emphasizes the importance of doing things hastily).

#### *Events and Referencing of Time in Shona Culture*

For the Shona, just as with other African people, time is also reckoned in reference to events pertaining to human beings, animals and birds (Babalola & Alokun, 2013). Time makes meaning when attached to these events as exemplified in the following Shona linguistic terms:

- *Rubvunzavaeni* (dusk)—after sunset when those who can no longer continue with their journey in the dark look for overnight accommodation at the nearest homestead;
- *Mashambanzou* (dawn)—early hours of dawn when animals like elephants ‘bathe’;
- *Mambakwedza* (dawn)—very early hours of the dawn when those who could not fall asleep, because of sleep problems, yearn for sunrise in order to solve pending issues;
- *Runyanhiriri* (dawn)—break of daylight when small nocturnal predators start hunting.

Events also govern the approximate reckoning of months as every month of the year has been named to make it convenient for the Shona to identify time



in relation to events that are popular in and/or unique to the particular month. Consider the months of the year and their corresponding activities tabulated below:

*Table 1. Activities by month*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Characteristics, activities and their significance</i>
<i>Ndira</i> (January)	Characterized by the appearance of very small insects, called <i>ndira</i> , on rocky surfaces and diminishing food reserves.
<i>Kukadzi</i> (February)	Believed to be a month when women ( <i>vakadzi</i> ) get the crops that ripen first and cook without their husbands' knowledge.
<i>Kurume</i> (March)	Men ( <i>varume</i> ) frequent forests for honey and wild fruits.
<i>Kubvumbi</i> (April)	Local weather is characterized by mist, fog and incessant rainfall.
<i>Bandwe/Chivabvu</i> (May)	Signs of the incoming winter season.
<i>Chikumi</i> (June)	The middle month.
<i>Chikunguru</i> (July)	Cold month when people sleep near the fire to warm themselves.
<i>Nyamavhuvhu</i> (August)	The weather is windy ( <i>kuvhuvhuta</i> ).
<i>Gunyana</i> (September)	The month when birds begin to lay eggs and have nestlings.
<i>Gumiguru</i> (October)	Is the tenth month ( <i>mwedzi wechigumi</i> ).
<i>Mbudzi</i> (November)	Marks the gestation period of goats ( <i>mbudzi</i> ).
<i>Zvita</i> (December)	Month of thanksgiving for the year ( <i>mazvita</i> ).

The names of months continue to live within the minds, literature and vocabulary of the Shona people throughout the year. Similarly, there are some years known for some particular happenings, especially natural disasters such as:

- *gore renzara*—a year that saw people experiencing severe drought and famine;
- *gore rehwiya*—a year characterized by an infestation of grasshoppers;
- *gore retungundu*—a year when there was an outbreak of anthrax;
- *gore remhezi*—a year of an extensive outbreak of scabies.

The naming of seasons can also be attached to the referencing of time in relation to habitual events. However, for purposes of avoiding unnecessary repetition, in this chapter seasons have been treated as part of nature in the next section.

#### *Nature and Referencing of Time*

Languages co-opt representations of the physical or natural world in order to mentally represent time (Baroditsky, 2011). In light of that, the Shona concept of time can be

realized through naming of the different seasons of the year. The next table shows seasons and the corresponding activities as dictated by natural phenomena, namely, weather and climate.

*Table 2. Activities by seasons*

<i>Season</i>	<i>Activities and their significance</i>
<i>Zhizha/Munhuruka</i> (Summer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abundance (<i>zhizha</i>) of self-growing edible but wild vegetables like mushrooms and okra.</li> <li>• Experiencing heavy rainfall (<i>kuturuka</i>).</li> </ul>
<i>Masutso</i> (Autumn)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plenty (<i>kusutsa</i>) foodstuffs from fields.</li> </ul>
<i>Chando</i> (Winter)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cold (<i>chando</i>) weather.</li> </ul>
<i>Chirimo</i> (Spring)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fields lie fallow while people rest.</li> </ul>

Time is tied to seasons and day-to-day activities as dictated by the weather and climate. The simple observation of natural phenomena is also significant in referencing by the Shona. There are certain environmental occurrences that point at specific times of the year. Consider the following:

- *nguva yepfumvudza* (when trees grow new leaves, spring foliage);
- *panobuda ishwa* (marks the emergence of flying termites);
- *panouya nyenganyenga* (characterized by the arrival of swallow birds);
- *panoonekwa mashuramurove* (characterized by arrival of the stork bird)
- *panomera hohwa* (time of widespread shooting/appearance of mushroom).

#### *Astronomy and Referencing of Time*

Astronomy is the study of the universe and objects in it, including the moon, stars and sun. The Shona reckon time through the movement and position of the sun, moon and stars. With specific reference to the sun, Mpofu-Hamadziripi et al. (2013) observe that Shona language has distinct words for the different degrees of light during the dawn, midday and dusk periods namely:

- *Mangwanani* (morning)
- *Masikati* (afternoon)
- *Manheru* (evening)

This reflects time-keeping practices that use the sun relative to the horizon, basing on the observation of the shadow. This strategy is quite scientific.

While during the day reference is made to the position and movement of the sun, during the night, time is similarly referenced using the state, movement and position of the moon as in:

- *mwedzi uchiri mutete* (newly formed moon);
- *mwedzi uchangobuda* (moonrise);

- *mwedzi wanyura* (setting of the moon);
- *mwedzi waora* (eclipse of the moon);
- *mwedzi wagara* (new moon).

Similarly, the Shona also use specific stars to demarcate certain time periods of the night. For instance, *vhenekeratsvimborume* (evening star) is a star that appears around 2100 to 2200 hours to enable senior bachelors to search for or prepare foodstuffs for supper, while *nyamatsatsi* (morning star) appears around 0400 hours early in the morning.

### *Time and Agedness*

In this last section of our discussion, we focus on time and agedness. In other words, we present time as a measure of one's chronological age which is calculated in years. By agedness in this discussion is meant *kukura* or *kuve munhu* (being mature). It is important to mention at the onset that ordinarily and especially in Western parlance, one's age refers to the number of years one has accrued whilst alive. Thus, one's age determines whether or not one is an adult. Further, concomitant with one's age are responsibilities and obligations such as voting, marriage or entering into other contracts. On the basis of this framework, one's adulthood is measured exclusively by one's age. Accordingly, the moment one reaches a particular age, for instance age 18 or 21, it invariably differs from society to society, one automatically is regarded as an adult, in other words, *ave munhu mukuru* (coming of age).

However, from an indigenous or traditional African perspective, Western-measured chronological age is considered as misleading. This is because according to the indigenous Shona, age defined as time one has been alive does not quite translate into one's adulthood. In other words, it is not the number of years one has lived that determines agedness or adulthood, but rather and very importantly, the quality of life. By quality of life, in this discussion, is meant one's *tsika* (behavior or manners) as determined by the community one is domiciled in. Thus, among the indigenous Shona, when they ask how old one is, usually the response is, *ava munhu* (he/she is now a person). It is essential to note that both the question and the response are both loaded and ambiguous, especially to 'outsiders'. They can be considered as such because firstly, regarding the stated question, it is not quite age as in chronological age which is the issue, but rather the type and nature of responsibilities one can shoulder. Secondly, the response sounds contradictory because what is meant is not that the individual concerned was not a human being before and has suddenly become one. Rather, what is being meant is that he/she is now a responsible person. In other words, it is not age as in the number of years one has that matters, but rather the responsibilities one can shoulder. Furthermore, it is not exclusively chronological age that determines one's age but rather one's level of *tsika* (behaviour) and responsibility as perceived by the family and community. Consequently, it is conceivable among the Shona to find some so-called adults who

may spend the rest of their lives being regarded as *vana* (children). These are adults who are usually sent to go and skin goats when other adults, usually men, are discussing serious issues of the village (*musha*). Being sent away to do such trivial tasks is an indication that the person is considered immature, not chronologically, but mentally. In addition, his contributions are considered as immature and inconsequential. What is important to note is that whilst these individuals are chronologically advanced in terms of numbers of years, they are still considered as immature or as overgrown children who cannot make meaningful contributions to family or village matters.

Furthermore, it is also conceivable among the Shona for a teenager to be considered an adult (*ave munhu*) (Gelfand, 1973). This is notwithstanding the fact that chronologically, he/she may be considered a minor. Such a consideration is based largely on the nature of responsibilities he/she can shoulder even though ordinarily being considered a minor. It is instructive that among the Shona, age apart from being a social construct has epistemic as well as metaphysical or spiritual value and symbolism. Thus, according to the indigenous Shona people, the elderly were highly revered in their families as well as the society at large. This is unlike in the contemporary world where they are sometimes confined to 'homes'. We argue that agedness is highly respected because we believe that they are considered as invaluable depositories of wisdom and infallible knowledge, and they were sources of advice and information, hence were considered indispensable. African people, including the Shona, believed that old age was associated and accompanied with wisdom and understanding of the world and it was the duty of the elderly to instruct the youth in socially accepted manners or behaviors. Accordingly, the community was expected to respect them.

Secondly, they were highly respected because they were considered to have metaphysical links between the world of the 'living' and that of the 'living dead' (*vadzimu*). They were considered to be facilitators of dialogue between the physical and the spiritual realms. In view of this, their role and place was not to be compromised. This view leads us to another related issue which is very important to the Shona, notably, the notion of *presence* associated with *agedness*. In further elaborating the issue of *presence* as being crucial to the Shona order of things, it is interesting to note that the 'aged' could be very old to the point that they no longer make sound and logical contributions. In spite of that their presence is still considered crucial. For instance, one of the authors had an experience whereby a marriage function (*kuroorwa kwemwanasikana*) had to be delayed until *mbuya vemusikana* (the girl's grandmother) had come. Unfortunately, because she was very old, in her late nineties, she had to be carried in an ox drawn scotch cart (wagon). As soon as she arrived she was given a cup of tea with bread and jam, she asked for a mat (*rukukwe*), and in no time she was asleep. The people who were there to witness the ceremony did not bother about her being asleep on her arrival. They were actually happy that at least she had arrived and therefore the business of the day, *kuroodza*, commenced "with" her, but "without" her because she was asleep.

## INTERROGATING THE CONCEPT OF TIME AMONG THE SHONA

What is noteworthy from the above is that the importance of the aged or the elderly is not in their contributions, to which they may not make any. Their importance is in their *presence*, which has a metaphysical significance from the Shona perspective. This is because the elderly, in so far as the indigenous Shona are concerned, are considered as a link between the physical world of the living and the metaphysical or spiritual world of the “living-dead” (*vadzimu*) (Mbiti, 1975). To that end, we present agedness as a sign of having lived longer and experienced many things, and not as a “curse.” Age is seen as a blessing firstly to the individual concerned, and secondly to the family and community. Furthermore, according to the Shona, age is not so much about the length of time one has been alive or the number of years, but rather the quality of life one has lived. Essentially therefore, we present age according to the indigenous Shona as time which has a social, epistemic as well as metaphysical or spiritual significance.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the utility of IKS. Whilst there are similarities between western and indigenous African concepts of time, a number of differences have been noted. Events in the physical environment are closely linked to the concept of time. For Africans, and the Shona in particular, time is sacred. There are certain activities that are prohibited during certain times of the year as this violates taboos. A relationship between aging and time has been demonstrated in this chapter. The elderly in Shona society are highly valued due to the wisdom that they possess. The concept of time is embedded in the context of IKS.

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