



On Prospective: Development and a Political Culture of Time

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Abstract

This paper interprets the African development crisis as a crisis of *initiative*. Right after the Lagos Plan of Action was adopted in 1980, came in 1981 the Berg Report on which were built the Structural Adjustment Programmes that African countries were soon forced to adopt. Unsurprisingly, the weakened states and impoverished populations lost sight of what was the driving force behind the Lagos Plan of Action; that is, a long-term perspective, a horizon for development. Along with developmental perspective, what was thus lost was nothing less than *meaning*. This crisis of meaning is felt today particularly in Africa's youngest generations who perceive themselves as futureless unless they emigrate. Because meaning flows from the future to the present, and is about shaping the future, this is a philosophical reflection on time which is also a call for the reconstruction of meaning through the cultivation of 'a prospective capacity' in our African societies. Analyzing this philosophical concept as it was developed by Gaston Berger, this paper argues that such a cultivation of 'prospective' amounts to fostering a *political culture of time* which is to be understood in total contrast with the ethnological approach attached to a so-called 'African' notion of time.

Résumé

Cet article voit dans la crise du développement en Afrique une crise de l'*initiative*. Après que les pays africains eurent adopté, en 1980, le *Plan de Lagos*, le Rapport Berg a été publié quelques mois plus tard, avec pour conséquence les différents Programmes d'Ajustement Structurels auxquels, bientôt, les pays durent se soumettre. Ainsi des États affaiblis et des populations paupérisées perdirent de vue ce qui faisait la force du Plan de Lagos: une perspective à long terme, un horizon pour le développement. Ce qui s'est ainsi perdu alors, en même temps que la perspective du développement, c'était, tout simplement, *le sens*. Cette

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crise du sens est aujourd'hui particulièrement sensible au sein de la jeunesse africaine qui se voit privée de tout autre futur que celui offert par l'émigration. Parce que le sens vient se projeter sur le présent depuis le futur, parce qu'il est dans la création du futur, on appelle ici, dans une réflexion philosophique sur le temps, à une reconstruction du sens par le développement, dans nos sociétés africaines, de la 'capacité prospective'. L'analyse de ce concept philosophique mis en chantier par Gaston Berger conduit à dire que cultiver la 'prospective' n'a rien à voir avec l'approche ethnologique si attentive à ce qu'elle appelle une conception africaine du temps.

*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.
Psalm 90:12.*

Developmentalism in the spirit of the sixties is said to be *passé*. In the name of developmentalism, following the formal political independences of its nations, Africa had adopted almost everywhere on the continent one party political systems assumed to be the best tool for constructing or preserving national unity and at the same time for galvanizing and channelling energies towards socio-economic betterment. Developmentalism thus understood has died from the political and economic failure of that spirit of the sixties and early seventies. Then, while it was repeated that a different philosophy of development was needed, what took place following that failure was the dismantling of what gave meaning to the very notion of development: planning. The actions taken under the auspices of the IMF and the World Bank aimed at restoring macroeconomic balance were presented as absolutely necessary—that is urgent and inevitable. Weak African States and impoverished populations were engaged in the same struggle to make ends meet, narrowly on a daily basis. What was lost was long-term perspective, a horizon against which actions taken would make sense, in the context of an open future; also lost was meaning.¹ Behind the recent calls for an 'African Renaissance' or for NEPAD (whatever one might think of their actual content), there is the acknowledgement that the true face of the African crisis is a crisis of *meaning* and *signification* within the context of time. Contemporary Africa is aware of its still contested-for past, the colonial interlude, and the slow disjunctive time of the present, making interpretations of the future problematic. The future is problematic because there is no clear sense of an African *telos* thereby making it possible almost by default for Western generated theories of development to be foisted on Africa without much questioning. A reintroduction of the idea of development as a long-term perspective under

the aeges of African agency would be one way to confront the future. In this regard the idea of African development need not be satisfied with IMF or World Bank recommendations, or the latest position papers on economic development generated thousands of miles away in Western research centres.

For many years, the African Futures project, established in Abidjan has endeavoured to build and develop long-term perspective capacity in the continent. Presenting this project and at the same time the text *Afrique 2025* produced under its auspices, here is what the coordinator of African Futures, Alioune Sall, writes:

After having been decried and relegated to the status of an antiquity along with state-planning (to which it was assimilated), long-term perspective is now re-established in development circles. As a matter of fact, 2015 is the horizon currently considered by the United Nations for the realization of the development objectives of the millennium while 2025 –that is the span of a generation. It is the horizon agreed upon in about twenty national long term perspective studies that have been undertaken in Africa with the technical support of the UNDP program known as *African futures*. Consequently, long term perspective reflection is gaining or regaining legitimacy. We must be satisfied with this new situation and rejoice over it with all those who, not so many years ago, had to spend a great amount of energy to get decision-makers to comprehend the meaning and importance of a long term perspective approach as they were submitted to the dictatorship of urgencies and, particularly in Africa, to the hardships of structural adjustment programs (Sall 2003:11).

Two important points can be made, to comment on this quotation. One about what development is not, the other about what the essential component of the notion of development is. What development is not is dealing on a daily basis with urgencies, trying to meet the demands of structural adjustment programs. What is essential to the very notion of development is *time* understood as *duration*, the political culture of temporality.² It is not only that the many social, cultural and economic transformations that a society undergoes as its ‘development’ need time but, more importantly that, as Alioune Sall again puts it, ‘the future does not come by itself but has to be met and the conditions for its hatching have to be created’ (Sall 2003:11). In other words, at the core of the notion of development, is the exploration of the future, the attitude which is best expressed by the philosophical concept of ‘prospective’,³ coined by the French philosopher Gaston Berger to name the science which explores the future evolution of societies in order to light up the decisions that

have to be made *today*, the actions that are to be taken *today*. In other words, the prospective attitude, which is essential to development, is grounded on the notion that the meaning of the present comes from the future. The central question of development is thus that of fostering *prospective* in African societies.⁴ This means posing the philosophical question of time.

To think a political culture of time is first to get rid, theoretically and practically, of what I would call the ethnological divide between cultures concerning time. Such a question is often translated into cultural terms, very hard to dislodge, such as the 'African conception of time' the stake of which is inevitably whether or not such a conception contributes to the development of a prospective attitude. In this perspective, I would like here to first discuss this 'translation' by revisiting what John Mbiti has written about this so-called 'African notion of time' in his well known work, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Mbiti 1990).⁵ I will argue that those who, like Mbiti, pretend to read a distinctly African concept of time in African cultural attitudes and languages in order to contrast it with the prospective attitude demanded by development misunderstand the very essence of time and hence, of prospective. I will demonstrate that there is nothing distinct or unique about the concept of time drawn from an African culture and I will show that in any case prospective has nothing to do with a culturally defined notion of time.

About the ethnological divide between cultures in relation to time

It may be useful to make a detour and consider seriously John Mbiti's analysis of African concepts of time. First, for the general reason that in prospective studies the cultural parameters are crucial. Exploring the future of values and mentalities is probably more significant than the economic parameters *stricto sensu* for a prospective exercise when considering, for example, a temporal horizon such as the span of a generation.⁶ Because these parameters, on the one hand, oppose the strongest forces of inertia to change but are also, on the other hand, such that when they do change, they make the biggest difference and generate the most decisive transformations in the society. This is the sense in which one may say that development is essentially a cultural question. And at the very heart of this cultural question of development, John Mbiti places the concept of time. From their conception of time, he argues, stem the attitudes, beliefs and practices that are manifested, in particular, in the people's philosophy of work. And he calls for further research to fully take into account the centrality of time-consciousness in the studies of African philosophy in

general and of the cultural dimension of development in particular.⁷ The following are the main affirmations made by John Mbiti as they result from his analysis of African concepts of time:

- 1) *Time is a composition of events.* In other words, the concept of time cannot be understood otherwise than in connection with the events that take place. And we should not even say 'take place *in* it' because this formulation would convey the notion that time could have independent being as some sort of frame which subsists when the events are mentally taken out of it, so to speak. In the same way that 'it is the content which defines space' (Mbiti 1990:26), it is the event that defines time. Time is not the *form* for the events in any Kantian sense; it is not the *order* for their succession in any Leibnizian sense: time *is* these events and *is not* outside of them.
- 2) *The past is the most important dimension of time.* This is an obvious consequence of the first thesis: if time is the stock of events it can almost be totally identified with the past which is but these events once they have occurred.
- 3) *The present is continuously in motion towards the past.* This is again obvious from a physical perspective but also has an important 'meta-physical' corollary: the dynamic of the present and indeed its meaning is oriented towards the past. The 'now' of our consciousness and actions ultimately rests on the ocean of past events receiving again and again, as drops that add nothing to it, the events we call our 'present'.
- 4) *There is virtually no future.* This is of course necessary because there is, by definition, a contradiction in considering a future event. As John Mbiti writes, time really 'is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future' (Mbiti 1990:16). The only aspect of the future that can be said to 'exist' is that which is constituted by what we might call *quasi events*, meaning that the present is pregnant with them, and that they can be read in it, so to say, *now*, in the same way the harvest can be read in the blossoming of the seeds. Practically, this means that one cannot consider the future beyond the close horizon of a few months, beyond tomorrow, beyond the shadow that, already, it retro-projects, *now*.
- 5) *The evidence to support these affirmations comes mainly from the consideration of the African languages and calendars.* The best testimonies for Africans' concepts of time are of course the way in which they reckon time in their languages and also the way in which they cast the flow of temporality into calendars. In fact John Mbiti

presents the study of the east African languages in which he has carried out his research as a 'test [of his] findings'. So examining, in particular, the verb tenses in the Kikamba and Gikuyu languages he comes up with the 'confirmation' that 'there are no concrete words or expressions to convey the idea of a distant future' (Mbiti 1990:17) the one that lies beyond the span of a few months, two years at most. Then he goes on to give an account of African calendars that he calls '*phenomenon* calendars' in opposition to 'numerical', mathematical calendars that are not tied up with concrete phenomena taking place and constituting time. Hence, as watch time is different from the time measured by an activity, hours and months (lunar of course) are named as the time for given events such as 'milking the cattle' in the morning and the evening, or 'the sun [being hot]', from which the month corresponding to October bears its name in the language of the Latuka people.⁸

- 6) *Planning for a distant future is foreign to the society.* This is one of the most crucial consequences of the affirmations made by Mbiti, especially in connection with the project of developing a prospective capacity for development. In Mbiti's words: 'African peoples have no 'belief in progress', the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor 'build castles in the air''. The centre of gravity for human thought and activities is the [past] period' (Mbiti 1990:23). And Mbiti puts great insistence on the point that many sayings, seemingly based on ethnological facts, concerning some distinctive African way of *wasting* time have to be understood as stemming from this metaphysics of time; once what time means for the Africans is fully understood that way, the attitudes associated with wasting time then appear to be truly 'waiting for time or in the process of 'producing' time' (Mbiti 1990:19).
- 7) *The future dimension of time has been forced into African societies from outside and is still in the process of being appropriated by them.* In other words it took a catastrophe, in the literal meaning of this word, to have African societies discover or extend the future dimension of time. This catastrophe has taken the face of 'Christian missionary teaching' or Western-type education or modern technology and has led 'to national planning for economic growth, political independence, extension of educational facilities and so on'.⁹ And the fact that this is a rupture explains why this process, far from being a smooth one, is 'at the root of (...) the political instability of our nations'. So the African

crisis is structural and its ultimate philosophical meaning is to translate the disruption represented by the introduction of the future dimension of time in an environment where the centre of gravity was in the memory of the past, the emphasis on tradition.

John Mbiti's chapter on 'the concept of time' ends with a challenge to scholarship on Africa which has the function of dismissing negative or critical reactions to his affirmations, mainly from those who would think these are bordering the notion of a different African mentality understood *à la* Lévy-Bruhl and would not accept the conclusion that the future dimension of time is absent from the African languages and traditional experience. The challenge is to come up with "another sustained analysis of African concepts of time' instead of just saying 'yes' or 'no' to his theory'.¹⁰ The burden of proof lies on the contradictors who have to produce evidence of contrary theses.

Opposing a political culture of time to a cultural conception of time

One of those who took up John Mbiti's challenge is the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye (Gyekye 1987) who opposed to the Kenyan's views on the subject his own exploration of Akan concepts of time. The approach is thus to come up with a counterexample in order to destroy any universal character of John Mbiti's claims about an *African* notion of time. Actually, there is no need to try to come up with counterexamples presented by this or that particular African language where the future tense is seemingly fully present or with traditional calendars used in this or that African group which do not operate the way described by J. Mbiti. The challenge, as formulated would simply lead to some kind of impasse under the form of a futile opposition between philosophical examinations of different African languages and the subtleties of their verbal systems. It is the very assumption upon which the opposition is founded that needs to be questioned and eventually dismissed.

This assumption is indeed the one expressed by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl in his account of what appeared to him to be *the* (primitive, hence) African conception of time:

(...) the primitives' minds do not represent time exactly as ours do. Primitives do not see, extending indefinitely in imagination, something like a straight line, always homogenous by nature, upon which events fall into position, a line on which foresight can arrange them in a unilinear and irreversible series, and on which they must of necessity occur one after the other. To the primitive time is not, as it is to us, a kind of intellectualized intuition, an 'order of succession'.¹¹

The most appropriate answer is not to defend Africans from 'primitiveness' in their representation of time but to say that it is just not true that there is such a thing as a Western notion of time against which one would actually characterize the African conception of time as 'primitive'. And to insist on this point makes far more sense towards a political culture of time than throwing back and forth examples and counterexamples to illustrate or refute the assumption made. What linear notion of time and what conception of the future is behind the French word 'avenir', for example? This word which translates 'future' literally and etymologically means 'what is to come'. Now what indicates that we have in mind, using the word *avenir* six months rather than two or a hundred years? Nothing but the context is the good answer. And what makes it a good answer is that it is the same for all human languages. For example, the word for 'future' in the Wolof language, *ëllëg*, literally means *tomorrow*. Now does one mean literally 'tomorrow' if one says that one is working *ngir ëllëgu njaboot gi* that is to say 'for her children's future?' The context clearly shows that the scope one has in mind here is the time when the children reach adulthood. And parents often project in time when they visualize and discuss the very future adulthood of their children. Also activities within the precolonial agricultural societies of Africa were focused on planting and harvesting within the context of at least one year and often many years, as when late-bearing fruit trees are planted. But back to the word 'tomorrow': of course, in English or in French for example, the word 'tomorrow' has exactly the same use.

In the same way one could raise the question of the 'representation of time' revealed by the use of a calendar where months are named after the god of war or Julius Caesar or Junius Brutus or Augustus... The answer of course is that no one has these associations in mind when using the names 'March', 'July', June or 'August'. And incidentally this Julian calendar is of African origin being invented by the ancient Egyptians. Note too that the Dogon of Mali, whose knowledge of astronomy was surprising to French anthropologist, Marcel Griaule, celebrate the star Sirius *every sixty years*. And there are other instances to note in this regard. Thus going back to the etymology of the term itself could perfectly allow us to use Mbiti's terminology and speak of a *phenomenon calendar* for the one currently used in the West as well. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that there is not a clear divide between (African) societies using phenomenon calendars and different (Western) societies using numerical calendars. Calendars in general may have *phenomenon* origins: very quickly their use is just *numerical*.

More generally, the problem with the kind of linguistic philosophy that concludes the way Mbiti does is to *overanalyze* African languages reading, as it were, too much into them as one is too busy seeking the cultural differences they are supposed to reveal between a concrete oriented African mind and an abstract Western mind. Such a preconception leads one to forget, in the process, that the same kind of *over-analysis* can be conducted for virtually any human language and would bear the same kind of conclusions. What this type of linguistic philosophy fails to take into account is that if words do have (often concrete) *origins*, they have above all *uses* which, ultimately, determine their (often abstract) meaning.¹² In so doing one does not only come up with an 'invented' Africa to use Valentin Mudimbe's phrase but with an invented 'West' as well.

In his posthumous works Levy Bruhl came to acknowledge this kind of objection about 'inventing' the other's mentality. But, even more important than the way he invents the 'primitives', he missed the point that the comparison made was flawed in the first place: it was not drawn between comparable terms but between *experience* of time on the one hand and *concept* of time on the other hand. The 'straight line, always homogenous by nature, upon which events fall into position', the 'line on which foresight can arrange [these events] in a unilinear and irreversible series, and on which they must of necessity occur one after the other', that line may express a *concept* or rather an image of time. It does not describe an *experience* of time, let alone an experience presented as common to the 'West'. In the 'West' as everywhere else it is the *human* experience of time to measure a distance by what and how long it takes to 'get there', to have not an 'always homogenous' line but rather differences between the time of our impatient desire and the time of our boredom. Everywhere human beings, to use Bergson's image, experience time when they have to wait for their sugar to melt in their coffee and not when they imagine it as a 'straight, homogenous line'. Nobody's experiential time, neither 'ours' nor 'their', is that mathematical time, of which we always speak in spatial terms like a 'line', a 'flow', etc. because that is the language of our intelligence (which means, according to the etymology, the faculty by which we hold things together, in the same mental place, as it were) and not our experience of time as *duration*. This Bergsonian notion of time as duration is an excellent antidote to the ethnological inclination to present an African concept of time (cyclical, futureless, and God knows what) radically different from a Western (linear, mathematical, infinite) concept of time.

In sum, both Mbiti and Levy Bruhl may be criticized for the essentializing respectively of precolonial African sociology and African cognitive processes. Proof of this is that the putative 'Western notion of time' is in reality *modern* Western time. For the most part, time in Europe was impressionistic, non-linear and finite until the period of the Renaissance and the commencement of literacy, some four hundred years ago. And then, there is the question of the isomorphism of time, well-established in modern physics. If the human mind can grasp the past it must also grasp the future. For the past of whatever duration was at one time also a future. So political culture of time is not about how time is lived but how it is *managed* and this is done through 'prospective'.

Developing a political culture of time through prospective

Léopold Sédar Senghor's thought and action have undergone some eclipse now as his philosophy is considered an old story of 'essentialism'. Yet one should not ignore the importance in his thought of the necessity of self-transformation through action¹³ or the centrality of prospective in his political philosophy. He thus wrote: 'When we became an independent nation I had to interrupt my literary work to solve planning problems, those faced by our young state. Now, what is planning but a prospective project? This is what leads me to keep from the Franco-Senegalese philosopher's work only what pertains to his philosophy of action: prospective'.¹⁴ A reader of Gaston Berger, referred to in this quotation as 'the Franco-Senegalese philosopher',¹⁵ he understood how crucial it is to ground development on the notion that our actions today draw their orientation and significance from tomorrow. That meaning, as it were, flows back to the present from the future. This is the very foundation of his insistence on prospective and planning as the substance of development. One example often given to illustrate the failure of developmentalism is to look back at Senghor's projections for the millennium and to ridicule his views about the year 2000 as the year of Senegal's economic take off. Did the projections go wrong? Of course they did, but he was right making them, that is to say assigning the year 2000 as the horizon of meaning for all actions of development. As a philosopher, a poet and a man of action he had grasped the essence of development as prospective and of prospective as a political culture of time.

What is prospective? John Mbiti's ethnologist view considers that planning is founded on the Levy-Bruhlian notion of a time seen as 'a line on which foresight can arrange events in a unilinear and irreversible series, and on which they must of necessity occur one after the other'. And since

he considers such a conception to be a characteristic of Western culture, he naturally concludes that the spirit of foresight has to break into African societies through Westernization and Christianity. The main lesson to be learned from Gaston Berger is precisely that prospective, the true attitude of foresight has nothing to do with an image of time and the future as a 'straight homogenous line'. More precisely, such an image is the absolute contrary of what a true understanding of what the future and its exploration mean. The most famous and striking image often used by Berger to illustrate the full significance of a prospective attitude is that of a car running faster and faster on an unknown road, racing along through the night; this car needs to have powerful headlights that can reach further and further if a catastrophe is to be avoided. This image tells us something important about the nature of time, more precisely about its future dimension. We do not know what it will be like just as we do not know what the shape of the road is while it unfolds itself under the lighting of the car speeding along on it. In other words, the concept of a future lying ahead of us and not as continuous creation of our own moving present is not a 'Western' or a 'modern' notion of time. It is an absurdity. This is to say that, contrary to what Mbiti affirms, a future void of events is not the condition for prospective thinking; that would just be an effort to grasp nothingness. On the contrary, prospective is based on the freest possible imagination, but still remains an imagination of *possible scenarios*, of what has been coined in French as '*futuribles*' ('futable' would be the corresponding neologism in English: possible states of affairs that could become real).

One thing also important this metaphor tells us about the meaning of a prospective attitude is this: one has to continuously *anticipate* what the curves of the road will be as this is the best way to be ready to adjust to what will actually present itself. This is to say that the representation of the future changes continuously and so do the decisions we make in the present in order to shape this future. In a word, the image of the homogenous line empty of the events that will occur on it is at the opposite of the true science of the future that prospective aims to be.

There is another lesson in this image of a car speeding in the night with high beams on. A prospective attitude means that we act and operate according to our anticipations and not according to the past, or to what we hold as our 'tradition'.¹⁶ Another way to understand this lesson is to see that prospective is radically different from *extrapolation*, from simply prolonging the past into the future. In that sense, to paraphrase Gaston Berger again, development means that a society is racing towards its youth,

not towards its old age. We could define it then, in Bergsonian terms, as the movement of life and spirit which is the effort to go uphill while matter and its inertia are bound to go downhill. It would be a paradox for African societies where the youth make up everywhere the great majority of the population not to be going, through prospective and developmental political culture of time, towards their adolescence but rather towards a state of senescence signifying a crisis of planning, which in turn is the expression of a crisis of becoming. Such an attitude leaves the African youth with the feeling that it is futureless and condemned to find 'tomorrow' only in emigration. It is for this reason that there is an urgent need for new or modified paradigms of development, new theories of political economy and new critiques of received doctrines. For the African philosopher the task with regard to development lies not with the atavistic work of a Mbiti but with assiduous conversation with the futurist ideas of Fanon, N'Krumah, Senghor, Diop, Hountondji, Amin, and others.

In an important reflection on African initiative titled 'From the Lagos Plan of Action to the New Partnership for African Development and from the Final Act of Lagos to the Constitutive Act: Whither Africa?', Adebayo Adedeji evokes Africa's 'fundamental right and responsibility to occupy the driver's seat of the automobile of its destiny', using the same kind of metaphor Gaston Berger adopted to illustrate the meaning of prospective (Adedeji 2002:35). He rightly states in this reflection that indeed Africans had made attempts to shape their own future with a 'transformation ethics [that] rests on the firm belief that development should not be undertaken on behalf of a people [but] rather that it should be the organic outcome of a society's value system, its perceptions, its concerns and its endeavours' (Adedeji 2002:41). That is precisely one crucial dimension of prospective: the indigenous or 'organic' character of development. Today the question is whether NEPAD could provide the answer to the crisis of initiative that followed the burial of the *Lagos Plan of Action* (1980) under the structural adjustment program built on the philosophy behind the Berg Report of 1981? This question translates itself into that 'of the extent to which the initiative can serve as the foundation for a new optimism about Africa's future' (Olukoshi 2002:88). The answer depends on the true *appropriation* of agency by Africans, expressing their mastery over the very stuff societal development is made of. That 'very stuff' is time.

But how does all of this fit into the issue of development in Africa. First there are the exceptional parameters that Africa has to work with. This continent carries that aura of timelessness with regards to human habitation, being for a very long archaeological time the only habitable

area of the globe. And even its human constructions in history seem timeless: pyramids, Zimbabwe ruins, and so on. Modern-day liberal capitalism focuses on short term profits and constant disruptive change. Could prospective time in the African context extend the amplitudes of development so that development stretches from the next instance to far off time? In this regard growth and development would not just be short-term endeavours but also planned efforts for the long term. With a proper configuration of the idea of 'prospective' an African *telos* would begin to take shape. It is in this context that the idea of development would assume African agency to refashion it according to the dictates of contemporary African political economy, politics, and sociology.

Notes

1. I explore the question of the lost meaning to be restored in a work titled *Reconstruire le sens* (Diagne 2000). A question I was also very fortunate to be able to discuss with Lansana Keita, Nasrin Qader and David Schoenbrun when writing this paper.
2. The phrase 'political culture of time' which appears in the very title of this article is penned by French writer Jean Chesneaux (1998).
3. In English, 'prospective' is an adjective so the equivalent noun for the French word should be the phrase 'long term perspective' which has been used up to this point. But in order to truly capture the philosophical content of Gaston Berger's 'science of the future' the word 'prospective' will be used in the rest of this article, both as a noun and as an adjective (in the phrase 'prospective attitude', for example.)
4. Of course, the past is important and recapturing her own history was a crucial aspect of Africa's liberation. The emphasis put here on prospective as the source of meaning is also a way of seeing the past as a site for useful prospecting. To insist that the future creates the present, which is the basis of prospective attitude, is not to consider the past as divorced from the present but somehow to try to question seriously the situation on our continent where, as Lansana Keita put it in our conversation on this issue, the leaders seem frozen and catatonic in colonial time. To recast the past in its totality is, for example, Cheikh Anta Diop's project and this implied an attitude which, ultimately, is a prospective one. I agree with L. Keita that the central issue is that of a *telos* for the future, ridding Africa of a catatonic state where time is standing still.
5. The first edition, published in 1969 had been reprinted not less than thirteen times!
6. Gaston Berger writes: 'previsions are more likely to be accurate when they concern a long period rather than a short one'. And he adds that this is especially true for economic prevision (Berger 1958:1).

7. '...I propose to discuss the African concept of time as the key to our understanding of the basic religious and philosophical concepts. The concept of time may help to explain beliefs, attitudes, practices and general way of life of African peoples not only in the traditional set up but also in the modern situation (whether of political, economic, educational or Church life). On this subject there is, unfortunately, no literature, and this is no more than a pioneer attempt which calls for further research and discussion' (Mbiti 1990:16) This call for further research seems to have been answered a few years ago by the many contributors to a volume entitled *Time in the Black Experience*, edited by Joseph K. Adjaye (Westport, CN, Greenwood Press, 1994). More recently, H. Kimmerle and myself have published a volume on *the concept of time* in sub-Saharan Africa (Diagne and Kimmerle, 1998).
8. He gives the example of eight months bearing such 'poetic' names as 'Give your uncle water' or 'Grain in the ear' as they are so reckoned among the Latuka people; this example is presented as an 'improvement' on the one given in 1915 in J. Roscoe's study of *The Northern Bantu* people (Mbiti 1990:20, footnote 1).
9. See p. 27. What Mbiti says of Christian missionary teaching here is also valid for the Islamic opening of the religious dimension of *expectation*.
10. (Mbiti 1990:28). 'Nobody else has yet produced' such an analysis, John Mbiti claims.
11. Quoted in Joseph K. Adjaye (1994:3).
12. See, for example, the excellent work of reconstructing the etymologies and distributions of Bantu cultural vocabulary done by David L. Schoenbrun. One interesting instance in particular would be his account of the root *-langa* identified to mean 'report, announce, foresee future, prophecy' and which appears in words meaning 'announce, proclaim', or 'perceive from afar' or 'be clear, illuminated, transparent' or 'hope for, wait for something with much patience and hope'... (Schoenbrun 1997:211-212). The same David Schoenbrun in his review of Adjaye's *Time in the Black experience* rightly points out that 'claiming that 'traditional' African time is somehow concrete and that capitalist European time is abstract or mechanically severed from immediate social contexts' is but 'a rhetorical trap' into which scholars like Mazrui and Mphande fall in their contributions (Schoenbrun 1996, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, p. 172).
13. Senghor who called 'doux ethnologues' (literally 'sweet ethnologists' which is an evocation of the phrase 'doux rêveurs', sweet dreamers) those who fancied an African essence to be kept unchanged liked to think of culture, in 1950, using these words from Marxist thinker Remo Cantoni: 'A culture that does not want to change neither the world, nor man's external relations, nor his conditions of life is a museum culture which fears the fresh air of concrete action because it likes its dust and mold' (Senghor 1964:95-96).
14. This passage from Senghor's *Hommage à Gaston Berger* is quoted by Senegalese philosopher Abib Mbaye (Mbaye 1997:62-63).

15. As a matter of fact, Gaston Berger, the 'father of Prospective', was born in Saint-Louis, Senegal, on October 1st, 1896 and had a Wolof grand-mother, on his father's side, named Fatou Diagne.
16. Berger states: 'In fact, until now, it is the past that provided the answers as it was called here tradition, elsewhere habit, elsewhere common sense, sometimes laziness... Auguste Comte's famous phrase about the dead governing the living seemed to be valid everywhere' (Berger 1958:127).

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