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# Concepts of Social Time and Their Socio-Economic Implications

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## *Abstract*

*"Time" is an important socio-economic concept. Different societies perceive time differently. Within any given society, groups may differ one from the other on the way how each perceives time. Further more, the same individual may conceive time differently under different situations. These differences may have far reaching socio-economic consequences by shaping attitudes towards work, leisure and planning. Therefore, understanding how people in different cultures reckon time may serve as a foundation to study the socio-cultural factors of development. This article tries to explore different conceptions of social time and their possible socio-economic implications.*

## Introduction

Throughout this article, the term *time* is defined as "internal, ontological property of social events and processes (Sztompka, 1993: 45)". Thus we are dealing with time, not as it is measured by clocks or calendars, but by events. Our focus shall, therefore, be on the *qualitative* aspect of time (time in terms of events), and not on the *quantitative* aspect (time in terms of measurements).

The concept of *time* is one of the most important sociological concepts. Each academic discipline defines it in its own way. Economics, for example, defines *time* as duration needed for making business decisions. Therefore, it acknowledges the existence of overlapping business cycles like the Kitchen (inventory) cycles, Juggler (Kuznet's) cycles, and Kondratieff's cycles. Archaeology, on the other hand, conceives *time* differently; it takes the life cycle of certain elements (especially Uranium) as a means for measuring archeological time. Political history, in turn, has its own way of understanding time: major uprisings, conflicts, wars, periodic elections in democratic societies, etc., may be considered as reference points to reckon historic time. Likewise, physics, astronomy, biology, chemistry, etc. have their own way of perceiving and interpreting *time*.

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Different societies, as a consequence of differences in their cultures, perceive time in different ways: such as a linear continuum, or as a cycle of events. Moreover, within any given society different sub-groups may conceive of time differently: the younger generation, for example, may conceive time differently than the older generation; the employed may have a dissimilar perception from the unemployed, intellectuals from manual laborers, etc. Furthermore, the same individual may conceive of time differently under different situations. For instance, an hour spent on public act is seldom considered to be equivalent to an hour spent on a private affair. "There are various kinds of temporality and duration, not all measurable in the modern (clock) sense (Oster 1993: 11)."

Although different conceptions of time exist at the same time, one or few of them may dominate the others at a community level. It is only in this sense that one can talk about African, Asian, European, or Judeo-Christian and Islam, Confucian or Hindu concepts of time.

The objectives of this article are, therefore,

- a) formalizing concepts of social time so as to make value-neutral analysis possible; and
- b) pave the road for further investigations for value-loaded analyses concerning the implications of the dominant conceptions of time in determining the socio-economic development of community or nation.

The article discusses seven models of concepts of social time with greater emphasis on five on them; then it deals with the possible socio-economic implications of the dominant conception of social time.

### Models of Conception of Social Time



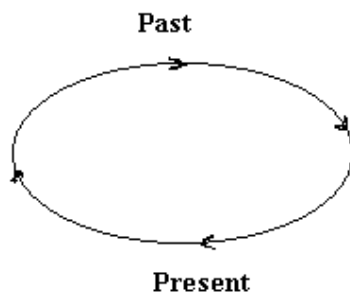
1. *Line-Segmental Conception of Time*

2. *Linear Conception of Time*

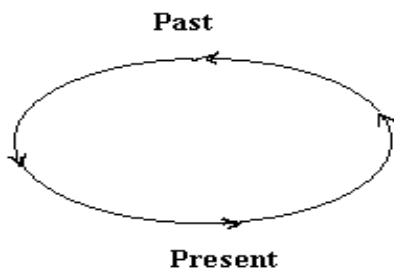
Past ————— Future



3. *Linear with Limits on Both Sides*



4. *Circular Clockwise Conception of time*



5. *Circular Anticlockwise Conception of Time*

## 1. Line-Segmental Conception of Time

*"When you are dead, you're dead and that is the end of you."*  
A Baka pygmy (Woodburn, 1986: 195)

Anthropologically, the line-segmental conception of time seems to be the oldest; although it still exists in different forms. According to this conception of time, neither the past nor the future is relevant. Events that occurred in the far past are either unknown or unimportant for today's life; and, therefore, they do not constitute social time. Events that are going to take place in the distant future are also unknown and unpredictable; and, therefore, they do not constitute social time, either. According to this conception, the only relevant dimension of social time is the present.

The cultural perception of life and death of the Baka pygmies of Cameroon may help us to understand the peculiarity of this mode of conception of time. The Baka pygmies are hunter-gatherers with highly distinct culture; and constitute a minority of the population of Cameroon. Robert Dodd, an anthropologist, said (as reported by Woodburn, 1986: 195):

*The Baka do not traditionally believe in a life after death; nor do they have concept of ancestors, ghosts or human spirits. When a person dies, there is an immediate period of personal grief and a sense of great loss, and then life continues as before. When questioned what happens to an individual when he is dead, conservative or 'traditional' Baka, like those with whom most of the research was done, reported that, 'when you are dead, you're dead and that is the end of you'.*

According to Colin Turnbull (1965: 47), a hunting minority in Zaire-Mbuti also avoids speculation about whether there is life after death and their response to the villagers, missionaries or any one who claim a knowledge of the after life is to say, "How do you know? Have you died and been there?"

It should be clear that the statement: "They do not have any concept of ancestors, ghosts or human spirits" does not necessarily mean that children do not know their parents, grandparents, or great-grand parents. They would certainly know them as long as they are in "NOW" time. They may even experience "immediate sense of great loss" when their parents die. What is actually absent here is the concept of ancestors, ghosts or human spirits; (the vital concept in all "modern" thinking) that the dead determine current events; that they are still "living" somehow. "If you are dead, that is

the end of you" implies that if you are dead, you cannot affect future events in anyway. Even the event in which you had a central role in shaping and realizing it while you were alive will "die" with you; that is the end of you! Note that "the immediate sense of great loss" has nothing to do with awareness of the past or the future. It has neither to do with the fate of the dead nor with that of the livings. It is the living (now) that experiences (now) personal grief and a sense of great loss of their beloved (now). The above line of argument is fully bounded by the "NOW" time. The absence of the concept of ancestors symbolizes the absence of linkage between the past and the present, and between the present and the future. Simply put, both the past and the future are void.

The line-segmental concept of time have existed and continued to survive in preliterate societies probably due to lack of the means and knowledge for keeping records of the past and limited capacity of predicting the future. In such communities, life is dominated by meteorological and biological events that are largely beyond human control.

However, this concept has revived with some modifications and it still exists in the modern societies including the Western civilization. Its reappearance takes the form of "**presetivism**", as is the case of linear, with limits on both sides, conception of time, which will be discussed in section III.

## 2. Linear Conception of Time

*Strictly speaking, there is no present, because social processes are continuous, and at every conceivable moment they are incessantly passing from the past to the future, they are already in the past, or no longer in the future, (Sztompka, 1993: 43).*

According to the linear conception of time, events and even life itself, are passing away. What has already passed and gone by is already out of our influence. We may learn from the past, but we cannot effectively change events that have already occurred. Thus, time has only two dimensions: the *past* and the *future* while the "present" is a matter of blind conviction, which actually does not exist.

From such a conception, one could arrive to a conclusion that people have only two tasks to perform: *evaluating the past* and *planning the future*. Implementation of plan occurs somehow automatically and subconsciously. For a simple analogy, assume a

person walking. He or she evaluates the distance covered and “plans” how to cover the remaining distance by determining his/her speed while, however, each step is taken subconsciously. This analogy is valid for more important events as well because implementation of grand plans demands planning how that plan may be executed.

Linear conception of time seems to be an optimistic understanding of the world. It conceives history as moving “forward” - towards a future climax. Further more, the past represents primitiveness, imperfections, lack of knowledge and poverty of various types. The future, on the other hand, represents promises for modernity, perfection, the fullness of knowledge, and happiness. Hence, each action should be judged according to its expected future value.

This conception has two dramatically opposite effects. On the one hand, it helps people behave in certain ways that benefit the future generation. It makes people wish to sacrifice their present well being in favor of the future. James Buchanan, the 1986 Nobel Prize laureate in economics, after delivering his Nobel lecture was asked the following question by Gunner Eliason:

*The conclusion of your talk is that modern governments are not really taking responsibility for the long-term. And if everybody that is operating in the market are also myopic, as we know that we are, who is going to take care of the long term? (Buchanan, 1987)*

J. Buchanan (1987) acknowledged that it is probably the most serious problem of all. He went further on describing that many of the current economic problems, including inflation and deficits, are associated with the declining awareness about the future well being.

*The Victorians knew that they were not going to live always, but they acted as if they were going to live always and created institutions for the purpose of being permanent institutions. I think we are living on a capital value of that heritage (Buchanan 1987).*

On the other hand, this conception may cause dangerous effects. Since the past is associated with primitiveness and imperfections, people will wish to preserve *only the best of what they have inherited*. Who is going to choose the best? Who is going to tell what is best for the well being of the future? The answer for both questions is obvious - leaders and, with a lesser success, intellectuals. Genetic, cultural, economic,

political, and social “engineering” of various sorts are some of the possible outcomes. Hitler’s eugenics program, the holocaust, African slave trade, apartheid, ethnic cleansing are only some of the many examples that have been justified on the basis of preserving only the best of the heritage.

People who conceive time in this way are generally unaware of the present. For them the present actually does not exist; it is only a superficial fabrication. They are ready to pay huge sacrifice for the well being of the future. They may accept current mass sufferings as a necessary price, if they believe that the future generation will live a better life. Charismatic leaders of all times and places and western and west-oriented intellectuals seem to favor this conception. The “pure model” charismatic leader, Jesus Christ, said: “If any man comes to me and hates not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple (Luke, 14:26).” The minimum requirement for giving one’s service to a charismatic leader has always been to ignore the present and look toward to the future in order to attain positive results, whatever they may be, through sweeping transformations regardless of the risks that might be involved in the present.

Historically, Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions are believed to have played vital roles in forming such a conception of time. God existed, exists and will exist. The universe was created some time in the past; and will come to an end sometime in the future, resulting into two dimensions of time, the past and the future. Beyond the future, after the universe has come to an end, time enters into a qualitatively new and different dimension where eternity is guaranteed. Thus, a righteous and holy person would ignore the present; willfully curtail the effects of his/her environment and altogether reject the present in favor of eternal life in the hereafter. *There is, therefore, no “present” for the true Christian and Islam.* This might explain why the followers of the two religions are often depicted as being the most militant as compared with others. Fascism, communism, and fundamentalism of various sorts have all emerged from cultures dominated by these two major religions of the world. This does not look as if it were a chance occurrence; on the contrary, a linear conception of time and the perception of history with futuristic direction and orientation seem to have much to do with it.

### **3. Linear with Limits on Both Sides Conception of Time**

*Time is the social interpretation of reality with respect to the difference between past and present (Luhmann, 1987: 274).*



According to this conception, there is no fixed moment where the past begins and the future ends. Actually, neither of them ever began nor ended. The past and future are temporal horizons; one may approach them, but never touch or surpass them. The essential characteristics of a horizon is that although we can never touch it or never surpass it, it nevertheless contributes to the definition of our situation (Luhmann, 278). What is meant by the "past"? The "past" as such is mythical time. For any past there is past; for any past of past, there is past. We do not know when the past started and we do not know when it ended. When we talk about events that took place in the past, we are talking about events that were present then, or we are expressing our present interpretation of events we think were present then. In both cases, the past does not stand independent of the present.

What is meant by the "future"? The "future" as such is also a mythical time. For any future, there is future; for any future of future, there is future. Neither do we know where the future begins, nor where it ends. When we talk about the future, we are talking about events that are likely to be present then, or we are expressing our current interpretation of events we think will be present in the future. In both cases, the future does not stand independent of the present.

Therefore, the real social time is the present time. It is in between the two mythical times: the past and the future. It "moves" bi-directionally, the past and future being its limits. This means that we must conceive both the future and the past as 'temporal horizons' of the present. The present thus receives a special status by virtue of its function. It interrelates time and reality and represents a set of constraints on the temporal integration of the future and the past (Luhmann, 278).

The *present* may be classified as follows:

**1. Present-Present** – the time span in which events occur. It is now, today, this week, this year and so on. We are living in the *present-present*; we are experiencing events that are occurring in it.

**2. Present-Future** – our present *vision* of the future. This is the future in our consciousness, in our mind, in our contemporary plans, and dreams. It is shaped by our hopes and fears. Almost all societies have their own present-future. For the optimists, it is prosperity, liberty, fraternity, equality, stability, unity and peace. For the pessimists, it might be hunger, ecological catastrophe, inequality, conflicts or war. For the optimists, it is heaven on earth; while for the pessimists, it is hell on earth. Even

within the optimists, for some, it is communism; for others - market-democracy. Individuals too have their own present-futures: to be a successful entrepreneur, president, manager, professor, or what ever. Present-day vision of the future is very important because it shapes the behavior of the actors in the present-present. Political and religious activities are among those that are highly influenced by actors' contemporary vision of the future. We behave according to our present-future and this, to a considerable extent, determines events in the present-present. Further more, the present-future is in constant change. It is, therefore, possible to change the present by changing the present-future.

**3. Future-Present** – set of events that are going to take place in the future. The degree of certainty that these events will take place is crucial. People are certain that they will die some time in the future; and this is probably the most important knowledge about the future that has already shaped human behavior. If a bit more information was available (for example, if people knew the exact date of their death, or if they were to die at a certain age), the behavior of humankind would have been radically different. If it is certain that an event will occur sometime in the future, it will affect the present as if the event itself is in the present. Assume, for example, that it is known that a volcano will definitely erupt in a certain city ten years from now. Evidently, planning, thorough and meticulous preparations, followed by energetic and enthusiastic actions to save the city and its inhabitants will certainly be taken as of the present moment. (Interestingly, the future-present may pass to the past without being in the present-present. In the example of imminent volcano eruption, scientists might workout methods that could neutralize the volcano, and therefore avoid the destruction of city. Thus, the event, which was certain to occur, may be made to pass to the past.) The future-present does not solely consist of events with a hundred per cent probability. It is composed of all events whose probability of being real is greater than zero percent, although most people conceive of it as a set of events whose probability of occurrence is quite high. Technological forecasting and controls enable us to incorporate part of the future with the present to form the future-present. The future, which is not integrated with the present either as present-future or as future-present is irrelevant; it is mythical time because it never begins, as Luhmann said (1997). This classification is different from the more popular notions "short-term" and "long-term". If it is not integrated with the present, the future is irrelevant independent of the term. An event anticipated to occur in 100 years from now is in the future-present (actions will be taken to control that event), whereas much of tomorrow is irrelevant; surely, we can neither visualize the whole of tomorrow, nor can we plan for every second of it.

**4. Present-Past** – present vision of the past. The present-past is our interpretation of events that occurred in the past; it is the past in our consciousness, i.e., in our mind, or what we understand when we read history. Almost all societies have their own present-past: for some it is perfect (the “golden-age” was in the past), for others the opposite. Likewise, individuals do have their own present-past, as well. The present-past is important because it shapes events in the present-present. It is not a novel fact that events occurred in the past can be interpreted in dramatically different ways by different people and groups. When a certain political group announces that it stands for the restoration of the country’s “glorious history”, it deals with its own interpretation of that history. However, if the interpretation is attractive, it might be sufficient to create serious events at the present. The birth of *Jesus*, *Mohammed*, or *Buddha* and the associated activities are believed to be events occurred in the past; but the interpretations of those events are in the present and they are still shaping the present. Thus, what is really important is not the event that occurred then but our present understanding concerning that event. For instance, it makes little difference, if any, if scientifically proved that neither *Jesus*, nor *Mohammed*, nor *Buddha* has ever existed.

**5. Past-Present** – set of events that occurred in the past but that are still influencing events in the present. It can be said it is what is *written* in history books. For example, World War II is an event that occurred in the past. It was in the present-present then; today, however, it is in the past-present because it is still actively shaping events (e.g. changes that have taken place in political restructuring of Europe). The past that is not integrated with the present, either as a present-past or as a past-present, is irrelevant. Again, this classification is different from the notions “near-past” and “distance-past”.

Linear with limits on both sides conception of time seems to be the prominent type of conception in the modern societies. In Neoclassical economics, for example, investment, employment, education, and other private economic decisions are based on *the present value of expected future returns*. *Permanent-income theory* and *Life-cycle theory* of Milton Friedman and Franko Modigliani, for example, describe how anticipated changes in future incomes influence the current consumption behaviors of the household. If a household anticipates (permanent) future changes in its dispensable income, it will start to adjust by increasing its expenditures, according to the above theories. Such an outcome cannot be expected from a society with a different concept of time. The concept of “time value of money” is a derivation of this concept. It is due to this conception that Franklin’s dictum, “time is money”, makes

sense. Under this conception, time is a private property, a private good that can be sold or purchased.

Although it is debatable, one may argue that this conception has served to the development of competitive market economy. However, there are several negative side effects as well. When time becomes a commodity which is subject to exchange, "commodity fetishism" may take a form of "time fetishism", becoming a master, King or Queen, even God. Since time is conceived as a vital scarce economic resource, problems of scarcity will manifest themselves in relation to time management as well. Whether or not the phenomenon of scarcity has helped people to work harder remains to be studied.

Another side effect associated with this conception of time is age. In societies in which such conception of time is dominant, "the aged become a social problem because they are not economically productive (Oster, 70)." They cannot serve the younger generation in anyway, even as advisors, because their knowledge soon becomes outdated. It is a society in which parents learn from their children and not the other way round.

#### **4. Circular-Clockwise Conception of Time**

*Generations come and generations go, but the world stays the same. What has been done before will be done again. There is nothing new in the world. "Look," they say, "here is something new!" But no, it has all happened before, long before we were born. Whatever happens or can happen has already happened before. God makes the same thing happen again and again (Ecclesiastes I: 4,9; II: 15 [Modern English Version].*

According to this conception of time, contemporary events are repetitions of events that took place some time in the past. Events that are occurring now will certainly reappear sometime in the future. Thus, the future, what lies ahead of us, is composed of events experienced by our ancestors. Days, weeks, seasons are passing away but certainly they will return back.

Probably, the most interesting thing in this model is that time "moves" first backwards from the present (if the present is taken as a starting point) to the past, and then forward from the past to the future to form a full cycle. However, there seems to be no convincing

reason to consider the present as a starting point since time is cyclical, with neither a beginning nor an end.

To illustrate the point, let us examine the life of an individual. According to this conception, birth is a *reincarnation*, a process by which the dead “return back”; a re-unification of the spirit of the dead with a new physical body. Thus, birth is not a one-time act, but that which starts long before fertility; and lasts long after birth. An infant, for example, is a yet not-fully-born person. A child needs to go through several stages and rituals to be considered as a fully born man or woman. Likewise, death is a long process through which the person “changes” his current physical body. It starts long before and lasts long after the physical death. The process of death starts at birth; the process of birth starts at death.

The Hindu conception of life and death is an example. As Shulman (90) has said,

*The Hindu universe is a closed circuit: nothing new can be produced except by destroying or transforming something else. To attain more life ... the life of the victim must be extinguished. Life and death are two facets of a single never-ending cycle.*

The Hindus cremate the corpse of the dead in order to be sure that the dead will be restored to life. “Cremation is cosmogony, and an individual's death is assimilated to the process of cosmic regeneration. It, therefore, represents a renewal of time (Parry, 76-7).” In some texts the dead is described as rising in the form of smoke from the pyre, turning into clouds, rain and then vegetables, which when eaten are transformed into semen (81). An alternative explanation is that the world was created by fire and flood; so is “the dead is cremated and his ashes immersed in water in order that he is restored to life (76)”. The funeral processes of an old person, for example, is described as a second marriage party and is accompanied by dancing. Although the explanations differ one for the other, the time concept behind them is the same: cremation is an act of creation; destruction of the corpse is a source of future life. If we follow this line of argument, then death regenerates life and regeneration of life causes death (81). Not only life and death, but also all other events pass away to the past only to return back in future.

What, then, might history mean under such a conception of time? What is the role of people in making history? As it is clear from the above discussion, cosmic law governs history, which is circular. However, life is not passive, as it might seem. There is

enough room for people living in the present to influence history in the long run. They may accommodate or deform the cosmic, circular course of history. If, for instance, Hindus do not cremate the dead, a tiny trend in the grand cosmic cycle will be deformed creating a new cycle for an inferior "strange creature." When the ancient Hindus and Chinese built castles, it seems, they were less aware of whether or not they were going to complete the project during their physical lifetime. The most important thing for them was that such actions accommodate the cosmic cycle, and hope that they would be reborn in the already built and completed castles.

Under this conception, current actions may be judged as effective only after a long period of time, when a full circle has been achieved. Sharp turns and "social engineering" are unacceptable since they destroy the cosmic law and time, regardless of whether or not the proposed radical ideas are attractive at the moment, because in the long-run the result of such actions may be dangerous since the cosmic law has not been preserved.

Under this conception, time is not a private property; rather, it is a public good like the air in the atmosphere. People may take care of it or neglect it, as they would take care of the atmospheric air, or pollute it. Traditional practices like Yoga can be understood as means of effective control against "evil" attempts of destroying the circular cosmic law and consequently the public time stock. This is why, the highest achievement in Yoga is to approximate the absolute - *Brahma* (Kapten, 1991). Of course, such cultural practices and norms instigate conservatism; but conservatism of this type is very different from conservatism based on past-orientation. This can be explained by the fact that despite the conservative attitude discussed above, the ancient east, where circular clockwise conception of time has clearly been dominant in the past, was striving to get control of time and therefore it was a very active society in terms of invention but relatively inactive in terms of implementing them in practice. That is why many of the major European innovations are results of the ancient Asian inventions.

## **5. Circular Anti-clockwise Conception of Time**

The crucial difference between this conception and the previous one is the direction of the movement; and it is so important as to make this conception distinct.

There are some common characteristics between the circular anti-clockwise and the linear conceptions of time. First, in both, the *present* is a cumulative effect of the *past*; and secondly, contemporary events define or limit the future. However, there is a third,

and seemingly paradoxical point in the circular anti-clock wise model, according to which the future defines or limits the past.

To illustrate the idea, let's take a farmer watering the young plants and clearing the weeds. The fact that he is doing these things today are caused by the legacy of the past that he has planted them in the past and that yesterday was not yet the right time to water and weed them. What he is doing today will, in turn, determine future events such as harvesting. It is, therefore, the existence of the harvesting period (which is in the future) that determined the planting period (which was in the past). But, how the farmer happened to know that there will certainly be (in the future) harvesting period that engendered all the activities of the past and the present? He learned this from experience; not from his own experiences alone but largely from those of his ancestors. It is, therefore, the knowledge of the past that has determined all of his past, present as well as future activities. Thus, the past is a source of all knowledge. He, who knows the past best, knows the future best. Societies with this conception of time are said to be past-oriented.

The concept of ancestors in such societies illustrates how vital is *past* for them. A child grows and become a man and then dies. But the *activities* of the man do not end at death, nor do people believe that he will be reborn again. Rather, he will join the "*pool*" of the *spirit of ancestors*. Then, the spirit of the dead, in collaboration with the spirits of all other dead members of the family and/or the community, as the specific case may require, continues its active participation in all major affairs of the family and/or the community. The dead, mainly as a group, not only share their wisdom and experiences with the living but also have unquestionable authority to pass decisions on essential problems faced by the living. The living also may seek the help of the spirits of the ancestors, through some appropriate rituals, whenever they face problems. The very existence and well being of the community depends on the general mood of the spirits of the ancestors. Among many other things, the spirits of the ancestors are the ones who determine the rate of birth in the community. "*Things Fall Apart*", the novel by the famous Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe (1958) excellently illustrates the role of the spirits of the ancestors in the life of a pre-colonial African village community. It explains how *things fell apart* when the Europeans came with their own concept of time and God and challenged and ridiculed the previously unquestioned authority and wisdom of the spirits of the ancestors and abandoned the associated rituals and practices.

According to the circular anti-clockwise conception of time, people (the living as well as the dead) are masters of time; they can create it or destroy it. However, the role of each individual is not equal, which indicates the status and the importance of the person. If the chief, for instance, wants to dance or just wants to watch people dancing, he will beat the drum to set the event in motion. If many other members of the community and the spirits of the ancestors feel the same, then time for dancing is created and everybody is free to enjoy it. Furthermore, if today's dancing was successful, the probability that it will be repeated tomorrow at approximately the same time is quite high. Thus, in the long run, time for dancing will be one of the established times, such as days and nights.

Often, even in the modern societies in which this concept of time is not dominant, festivals act as boundary-markers by which duration are divided.

*We talk of measuring time, as if time were a concrete thing waiting to be measured; but in fact we create time by creating intervals in social life (Harris: 1986: p. 135).*

The Lamis in Bolivia, an agrarian community, have two major sessions: the session of work and the session of rest. Festival for all saints and for all souls mark the sessions. During half of the year, the livings are at work, while the ancestors are on holidays in the world of the livings. During the other half of the year, beginning with the harvesting season, the ancestors return back to their land "over the sea" to cultivate red chili, while the living are liberated from their labors for a period of leisure and conviviality (Harris: 1986, p. 74-110).

According to this conception of time, people are masters of time; they can create as much time as they wish and whenever they wish. Once created, some events will soon become stable and established. The cost of destroying an established time may often be too high even for the important persons. A village market is an example. Time for a village market is, in most cases, set by the chiefs of the community, however it become independent of the will of its "creators." In some mythological stories men created days, nights and seasons in a similar way, as time for the village market. Once created, the cost of destroying such a time is so high as to make it impossible to be destroyed by an individual without the consent of others. However, apart from major events like seasons, village market days and festivals, which serve as references to "macro" time, there are also events that serve as references to "micro" times that can be relatively easily created or destroyed, even by ordinary people.



In communities where the circular anti-clockwise conception of time is dominant, any activity begins because it is judged and felt to be the right time to start it; otherwise people will simply wait for the right time to come. Waiting is not wasting time; time can never be wasted under this conception. *Waiting is an act of creation*. Time can be created actively as in the dancing and village market examples, or passively by waiting. For such tasks, calendars and diaries are useless. The most important knowledge is the one that refers to the experience of elders and ancestors. Oral literature has sufficiently served this task. Such a society is highly attached with the past; and elders are considered to be the wisest. This makes the society conservative. However, conservatism of this type is different from that of a society that conceives time to be a clockwise cycle. In the latter case, the society tends to be conservative because of uncertainty about the long run effects of current changes. Here, the society is conservative because the past is considered to be better than the future since it is a source of wisdom and happiness. The past represents the “golden age”; while the future is associated with troubles and challenges. This conception seems to be the most pessimistic.

## **6. Time as a Pendulum**

Time may be conceived as a pendulum that swings, to the right and left, i.e., to the past and then to the future. Thus, night and day, death and birth, failure and success, sadness and happiness occur one after the other. In this case, events occur depending on the position of the “pendulum.” Even in periods of deepest sorrow, people remain hopeful because they *know* that the “pendulum” will certainly swing back to the other direction to bring happy events into existence.

## **7. Time as a Spiral**

Time may also be conceived as a spiral. The conventional wisdom: “history repeats itself but not in the same way,” is a product of spiral conception of time. There are several types of spirals: clockwise and towards the center, anti-clockwise and towards the center, clockwise but off the center, and anti-clockwise and off the center. Although, each type has its own distinct characteristics, all spiral conception of time share the belief that an event that has occurred in the past may occur at the present or in the future but in a different way or in a different circumstance; or the event itself may have some unique characteristics. According to the spiral concept of time, although it is important, knowledge of the past is not sufficient to solve current problems.

## Constitution of Coexistence and Implications

The fact that different conceptions of time coexist within a society; and even within one and the same individual person may be taken as an indication that at least some of the conceptions are not mutually exclusive. However, the other equally vivid fact that there is a lot of misunderstanding between people may be taken as an indication that some of the conceptions are probably mutually exclusive, or, at least that they are highly competitive. This may lead to the kinds of argument discussed below that may have far-reaching political, social and economic consequences.

On the one side, one may argue that, thanks to globalization, the existence of clocks and calendars, time has become measurable; and, thus, an hour is an hour wherever in the world and in whatever way one 'spends' it. From this point of view, in today's world, there is no such thing as African, Asian or European time; there is only one *global* time. Therefore, the academic discussion on social time, which might have been important in the past, cannot serve any relevant and useful purpose today other than mental exercise; the distinction between *qualitative and quantitative* time cease to have any practical importance.

On the other side, one may argue that we, *Earthans*, are living in so different "worlds" (each with its own distinct dominant concepts of time) as to make us poorly comparable and compatible. From this point of view, it is not and cannot be easy for us, people from different *worlds* of the same planet, to have common visions, aspiration, goals and plans because we may understand and interpret the same events in dramatically different ways. Even if we may assume that it might be possible to design some common goals based on the narrow common denominators, attainment of the goals at the same time using the same amounts and quality of resources is unlikely because of the simple reason that the *rhythms* in which events occur "here" and "there" are different.

A totally different line of argument such as the one that follows is also possible. Yes, there are different concepts of time; however, the very fact that many of them simultaneously coexist in the same society and within the same individual is a strong proof that not only many of them are *not* mutually exclusive but also that a good number of them are complimentary to each other. Therefore, academic research on social time is relevant and it should be directed towards the search for easily adaptable by all of us and "appropriate" pure or hybrid model so that, at least in long-

run, we can have common understandings, goals, visions, aspiration, and plans, values that are extremely important for the very survival of human being.

Another important dimension of academic inquiry on social time may lead to investigation the practical implication of different concepts on political, social and economic development of a society, and whether designed corrective measures are possible and advisable.

Do differences in “dominant” conceptions of time really affect politico-socio-economic development of a society, and/or that of an individual? Or, to put it in more blatant way: Is there any specific type of conception of time (“pure” or “hybrid”) that can be described as the most “development friendly”?

On the one hand, it seems to be obvious that the way people conceive time shapes their behavior, especially their attitude towards work, leisure and planning. This seems to indicate strong cause-and-effect relationship between the dominant concept of time in a given society and the level of development of that society. On the other hand, question like: are the very meanings and desirability of “*development*” same or at least comparable and compatible in every society? Are the underlining visions and objectives of each society similar or at least compatible and comparable? Last, but not least: are conscious and pre-planned corrective measures possible and desirable? These and similar problems indicate that the problem of social time requires more complete and rigorous multi-and-interdisciplinary investigation.

## **Conclusion**

Social concept of time is one of the crucial elements in understanding social changes. How people conceive time determines their behavior including their attitudes towards life and work. Since all social changes occur in time, students of social change, or transformations could not avoid looking into the conception of time by different societies and cultures

If it is true that people conceive time differently, then they conceive social changes differently as well. Nevertheless, different conceptions of time exist in the same society and at the same time. The analysis of the nature and relationships between different conceptions time needs further and deeper inquiry. However, we can safely conclude this stage that different conceptions of time are neither mutually exclusive, nor are their relationships smooth.

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