

CHAPTER 19

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COMPETITION AND COOPERATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: A CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH

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Marta Fülöp & Noémi Búki

Introduction

Competition (when two parties strive for a goal that cannot be entirely shared) and cooperation (working or acting together in order to reach a common goal) as main forms of interpersonal and inter-group interaction have been the topic of cultural and cross-cultural research since the thirties of the last century. In these very first ethnographic studies (Mead, 1937a) African tribes were already included and since then there has been an accumulated research that reveals some characteristics (e.g. Munroe & Munroe, 1977; Friedman et al, 1985; Gneezy et al, 2009) of these social interactions in the African continent. The goal of this chapter is to summarize and review the available empirical research on competition and cooperation in sub-Saharan Africa and to provide a basis for forthcoming research projects.

Reviewing the scientific literature on competition and cooperation in the African context, a similar history can be revealed as in the general international research field. The very first data on competitive and cooperative behaviours originated from the anthropological studies of the 1930s (e.g. Mead, 1937a). Anthropological research providing an insight mainly into cooperative and competitive family relationships continued throughout the century (e.g. LeVine et al., 1994 in Kenya).

In contrast to the anthropological field work, in the 1970s the mainstream cross-cultural research on competition and cooperation was experimental, carried out in laboratories (Fülöp, 2004), but only a limited number of them focused on comparisons of African children or adults to – typically – Western counterparts (e.g. Bethlehem, 1973). This line of research had been gradually losing its prevalence by the 1980s and 1990s.

The topic of competition and cooperation emerged again since the 1980s in relation to cultural dimensions like individualism and collectivism (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Green, Deschamps, & Páez, 2005), interdependent and independent self-concept (e.g. Fernández, Carrera, Páez, & Sánchez, 2008), power distance (Carl, Gupta, & Javidan, 2004), masculinity and femininity (Hofstede, 1980; Van de Vliert, 1998) and assertiveness (Den Hartog, 2004). In these large scale multinational comparisons only a few sub-Saharan African countries were involved (e.g. The GLOBE Study, House et al., 2004). There have been only very few studies that directly examined the relationship between the cultural dimensions and actual competitiveness, and even less in the African context (Fernández et al, 2008; Basabe & Ros, 2005). The initial assumptions connected competition to individualism, independent self concept and masculinity, while cooperation to collectivism,

interdependent self-concept and femininity. In the 2000s this has changed, due to the contradiction between cultural assumptions and everyday reality indicating that competition may be even intensely present in collectivistic societies as well, Japan being one example (Fülöp, 2004) and forms of competitiveness were identified within collectivistic and interdependent cultural environments as well (e.g. Green et al., 2005; Fülöp, 2004, 2009).

In the last two decades research carried out on motivational processes in organizations (e.g. Carr, MacLachlan, Zimba, & Bowa, 1995) and research examining inter-group and inter-ethnic relationships and conflict (e.g. Dumont & van Lil, 2009) provided additional insight into competitive processes in the African organizational culture and society.

Cooperation and competition—cultural anthropological approach

The earliest studies on competition and cooperation in which African cultures were brought into focus can be related to Margaret Mead and her cultural anthropologist colleagues. Mead was asked by the Sub-Committee on Competitive and Cooperative Habits of the USA Social Science Council to contribute with ethnological material to the research on cooperation and competition. In her edited book “Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples”, (Mead ,1937a), the authors attempted to identify cultural patterns in so called primitive societies, classifying them cooperative, competitive and individualistic. The labels referred primarily to the mechanisms of distribution of goods stressed in the given social system i.e. if it is done competitively or goods enrich the whole group and contribute to its security. Competition and cooperation could be observed in several domains of life and the anthropologists were interested in finding dominant patterns of the two phenomena.

Two African ethnic groups, referred to as tribes by Mead and her colleagues, were presented in the book, the Bachiga (also called bakiga or kiga, living today in Uganda and Rwanda) and the Bathonga (also called batonga or tonga, living today mostly in the Republic of South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland). The description of cooperation and competition in these tribes was not based on direct research but the authors worked with already existing research results and published sources and reanalyzed those observations by placing cooperation and competition into the focus of their interpretation.

The East African Bachiga tribe from Uganda was described by Edel (1937) who, for the sake of the book, reanalyzed her former observations and data to focus on competitive, cooperative and individualistic phenomena (Mead, 1937b). The description of Goldman (1937) about the Bathonga people in South Africa is not even based on his own observations, but mostly on the ethnographic work of Junod (1912, 1913). Thus, the description of the Bathonga provides information about the life of these African peoples not from the thirties, but from the beginning of the 20th century.

The *Bachiga* social system described by Edel (1937) was considered *highly individualistic turning into competitive* in certain areas (like hunting or games played by children e.g. dart throwing). Individualism characterized their social and economic life, and even their family structure e.g. there was low social integration between the economically independent household units, private ownership of goods existed and there was no specific village organization. The tendency toward competitiveness presented itself among the Bachiga for instance in hunting when each man was striving to be the first to wound and kill the animal, in expressing a drive for power and a desire for personal glory, in calling attention to one’s own ability and boasting, in betting indicating a delight in winning. Beyond this, the different clans were constantly at war with one another for territory and cattle and were characterized by feud in inter-clan relationships, using aggressive strategies like

murder and vengeance. However, the individualistic and competitive traits did not exclude cooperation, which, according to Edel (1937), only appeared among family members e. g. the father helping in herding or in obtaining wife for the sons. The most frequent type of cooperation observed was helpfulness because of the lack of structure within which more complex cooperative behaviour based on distribution of labour could have occurred.

In contrast to the Bachiga, the *Bathonga* culture was considered *highly cooperative* and described as an example of a peaceful, not warlike political society, with high level of social integration. This social system consisted of the king and well-defined, well-organized kinship groups with mutual obligations. Beyond these, the Bathonga village was structured like an enlarged family; strict laws were organizing and regulating the community and the interdependence of the members of the society was present in several domains of life. The presence of shared goals among all members of the group, all of them working together toward these ends, could be observed. Goldman (1937, p. 360) considered the absence of competitive activities “quite striking”, all cultural forms seemed to promote the acquisition of wealth through non-competitive means. The Bathonga social organization was able to minimize the possible competition in other domains as well like sharing food and land. However, the absence of formalized rivalry for lands was explained by the abundance of suitable land. In general, in economic organization, technology and social relations little range was given to any expression of competition. But rivalry, impossible in normal social relations, appeared in a socially harmless form in games, while the struggle for kingship which occurred after the death of each king, resulting in dynastic wars, pointed to existing competition – called by Margaret Mead a “flaw” (Mead, 1937c, p. 446) in the cooperative system of the Bathonga – among specific circumstances in that society as well.

Mead (1937c) considered the contrast between the two tribes as very marked, because in spite of both being agricultural and pastoral people one was characterized by a cooperative and the other by an individualistic society. Therefore, according to her, what determines whether individual members in a society shall cooperate or compete with one another are the socio-cultural characteristics and the established structure of the society. Mead (1937c) emphasizes that none of these societies can be considered exclusively competitive or exclusively cooperative, cooperation and competition do not exclude each other, and they need to and do coexist in the society.

One major criticism regarding Mead and her colleagues’ work is that their analysis of cooperative and competitive behaviour was not based on direct research but they re-analyzed former observations that originally had no intention to describe these phenomena. The authors worked with existing materials and tried to reinterpret the observations in the framework of cooperation and competition and this may have led to biases and misinterpretations.

After Mead and her colleagues’ work there was almost no research among the abundant anthropological studies related to Africa that placed cooperation or competition in the focus, still descriptions worthy of note can be found, providing indirect information about characteristics of competition and cooperation in several African societies or communities. For example, Peristiany (1939), analysing the local social structure of the Kenyan Kipsigi culture in East Africa, pointed to the co-existence of cooperation and competition. Cooperative elements of the tribal organization were for instance the importance of the territorial village community (a group of households with members cooperating in agriculture, assisting each other in ceremonies and in hard times) or the peaceful relations maintained between the neighbouring Kipsigi tribes (regarded as brothers), and their mutual obligations (e.g. through intermarriage). Parallel to this, the existence of a defensive and

offensive army system of the tribe, each village having its own band, indicated the potential presence of inter-group competition and conflict.

Later Turnbull, who did not conduct direct research on these phenomena either, provided ethnographic descriptions related to competition and cooperation in African communities. In his controversial and methodologically strongly criticized book (Abraham, 2002), “The Mountain People”(Turnbull, 1972), he documented how social, political and economic changes altered the Ik tribe of the Kidepo Valley in Uganda, originally a cooperative, child loving tribe, to a highly individualistic and cruel community. He described a drastic alteration of the Ik tribe’s behaviour after the government forbade hunting and gathering in their original lands, and they were forced to change to agriculture. Due to the scarce subsistence facilities of their new limited territory the population size had to be reduced. In order to survive, the young, healthy breeding group let the children and the old members of the tribe starve to death, by not giving them food. Competition for basic resources, the need for survival erased all “social luxuries” like generosity, considerateness or kindness and family ties did not count. Even after the end of the aridity, the Ik chose the forms of surviving adapted to in this hard period.

In another book Turnbull (*The Forest People*, 1961) describes the world of the traditionally hunting and gathering Pygmies in north-eastern Zaire (today’s Democratic Republic of the Congo in Central Africa) presenting them as people living in peace and harmony with their environment and in highly cooperative groups with egalitarian conditions and flexibility of roles (e. g. both women and men hunt and gather). Turnbull states that in general, everyone was equal in wealth and power, there were no chiefs, no formal councils. Only a subtle, age-related social hierarchy could be observed within the tribe. Cooperation and sharing were fundamental to their lives from child rearing to hunting and there were no private ownership or inheritance of the land. The book received some criticism, though stating that Turnbull transmitted an excessively idealistic picture of “primitive peacefulness” regarding the African tribe (Liazos, 2008) .

Reflecting the ongoing diversity among the different African cultures, a study by Korten (1971) in Ethiopia revealed a rather harsh competitive ethos. He content analyzed behavioural patterns in Ethiopian folk tales. The tales represented life as a zero-sum game, in which one player wins and the other loses, they also described suspicion and distrust and survival strategies like deception, aggression and revenge that serve the advancement of oneself at the expense of others. This was in sharp contrast with the result of a similar analysis of American stories, in which only those who were classified as anti-social displayed such behaviour. The fact that the imagery of the Ethiopian stories was generally consistent with actual social behaviour in Ethiopia was well supported by documented prevalence of interpersonal suspicion, trickery, revenge and limited instances of cooperative behaviour.

Competition and cooperation in family life – anthropological perspective

Anthropological research in the 1970s observed child care habits and family life in different parts of Africa. One aspect of the observations was how sibling relationships are handled in the family. Varkevisser (1973) reports a kind of birth control to prevent sibling competition among the Sukuma mothers in Tanzania. According to him, these mothers protect their youngest against competition for the source of food, the mother's breast, by attempting to postpone pregnancy until the infant is capable of managing a standard diet. In a more recent study Borgerhoff Mulder (1997) investigated sex-biased parental investment in children among Kipsigis in Kenya. Peristiany in 1939 described the Kipsigi as highly cooperative within the in-group. Borgerhoff Mulder (1997), sixty years later,

describe how Kipsigi parents try to control and suppress competition for resources within the family. If parents have several sons they tend to reduce investment in them because they are likely to be in direct competition with each other and the father over the scarce resource of land. They also found that instead of having several brothers as rivals, sons enjoy greater parental investment in case they have several sisters, who instead of competing for resources bring in resources by marriage/bridewealth to the family.

LeVine et al. (1994) in their book "*Child Care and Culture: Lessons from Africa*" describe several examples of competitive and cooperative behaviour observed in sub-Saharan African and Kenyan Gusii everyday life. Polygyny, a frequent form of marriage at that time in Africa, resulted in competition among co-wives that led to an explicit set of rules for the husband whose role is to contain this contest among the several mother-child units for example by introducing a rotational schedule for the husband's visitations or a ranking of the co-wives.

A recent study conducted in Ghana (Tabi, Doster, & Cheney, 2010) found that competition and cooperation are intertwined among co-wives living in polygyny. On one hand they feel competitive and jealous towards each other, on the other hand they share household chores and child rearing. LeVine et al. (1994) found that competition regarding property and inheritance is frequently present in the families in cattle-keeping cultures of eastern Africa, from the southern Sudan to South Africa, especially among half-brothers (sons of the several co-wives). They express strong loyalty to their mother and they cooperate with her to protect the property from the father or others in the family. This is usually reinforced by the father's incapability or unwillingness to contain competition among co-wives and their sons. The resultant distrust and the tensions over property rights can lead to the isolation of childbearing women from each other and diminishes the cooperation of women from different houses in child care and other tasks. In addition to the above, mother-in-law and wife relationship can also become competitive over the son's/husband's emotional allegiance and economic resources among the Gusii in Kenya.

Among the Yoruba and Hausa of Nigeria, the Giriama of the Kenyan coast and the Fulani of Burkina Faso however, a high degree of cooperation is also present among women (LeVine et al., 1994). In most parts of the sub-Saharan region, the heavy subsistence burden carried by women during their childbearing years means that some assistance and cooperation in infant care must exist, in at least some seasons. In a multihousehold compound, women collaborate in household and infant care tasks, facilitating this behaviour in older children as well (LeVine et al, 1994).

Cooperation and competition in experimental social psychology since the 1970s

In the 1970s cross-cultural research on competition and cooperation became influenced by experimental social psychology. Anthropological research demonstrated that competitive and cooperative behaviours are intertwined in the social life of the different African communities, however, experimental social psychology tended to treat them as dichotomic (Fülöp, 2004, 2009). These were tightly controlled experimental designs mainly applying the Prisoner Dilemma Game (Luce & Raiffa, 1957) and in case of children the Cooperation Board Game (Kagan & Madsen, 1972). The studies adopted a particular operational definition of competition which is embedded within various experimental games, namely each of these games provides the subject with a finite series of options, which the experimenter labels as cooperative or competitive (Smith & Bond, 1998).

A participant was considered to be more competitive than cooperative if he/she chose the competitive allocation more often.

The main question of cross-cultural studies with African participants was to examine the influence of westernization versus traditional values and norms and the role of urban (mostly educated, middle class) versus rural (mostly uneducated, poor) origin in competitive and cooperative behaviour. The assumption was that white/Western/American participants, because they are mostly influenced by more individualistic, Western values, would be more competitive than black/African participants who were typically characterized by traditional African, more collectivistic values. Because black African living in urban areas were also hypothesized as being more Westernized, urban-rural comparisons were expected to reveal the same. The results, however, seem to be controversial, some of them confirmed such expectations, some of them provided no evidence for cross-cultural or socio-cultural differences. One possible explanation to this may be related to the applied methods, It is a question how much ecological validity such methods like the Prisoner Dilemma Game or the Cooperation Board Game have in case of rural African children or adults who are not accustomed to think in cost/reward matrices (PDG) or use such equipments as the cooperation board.

Munroe and Munroe (1977) compared 5-10 year old children from a peri-urban, semi-traditional Kikuyu community in Kenya and from a suburban area from the U.S.A using the Cooperation Board Game (Kagan & Madsen, 1972). The Kenyan Kikuyu children proved to cooperate more and therefore had a greater number of rewarded trials in the game than the Americans. The authors explained the result with the different socialization practices. Child rearing in sub-Saharan Africa emphasizes immediate compliance and obedience in assisting everyday household tasks and cooperation with members of the community in group activities, many times with no immediate tangible reward or with immediate rewards shared with others, while the U.S. children usually have less cooperative work experiences in this age and they focus on self-reward and are unable to appreciate shared rewards.

In contrast to this, Bethlehem (1973) found no significant differences in cooperative and competitive responses in playing the Prisoner's Dilemma Game (PDG) between white European (wealthy family background) and Zambian schoolchildren (from very poor families). This result was in contrast to his expectation because he conceptualized the Zambian society as putting emphasis upon cooperation and de-emphasizing competitive and exploitative behaviour. The relative absence of cooperation and altruism and the high variance in the Zambian children's responses were interpreted as a conflict between being competitive or cooperative being the result of a conflict between traditional and modern values. (This should be expressed more clearly. The statement is currently unclear) This interpretation was very similar to Meeker's (1970) who also applied the Prisoner's Dilemma design comparing Liberian Kpelle tribe men with a traditional life style and highly educated Liberian men with a modern occupation. Highly educated, urban men were less cooperative and more competitive. This result indicated the simultaneous presence of the traditional cooperative and the western competitive norms in the Liberian society. Bethlehem (1975) also applied the Prisoner's Dilemma Game with adult rural and urban Tonga participants from Zambia, and Asian university students studying in Zambia as well. The rural Tongas played more cooperatively than the two other groups and showed a tendency to choose a cooperative response even after their partner had defected, whereas other groups with a more westernized socio-cultural background tended to meet defection with defection.

Tyson, Schlachter and Cooper (1988) compared black and white South African male university students who had to participate in a PDG situation and to rate the co-players. Black co-players were

attributed to have greater cooperativeness, while white co-players - greater competitiveness. Beyond this, the study confirmed the result of a previous study by Dutton (1973) in which both black and white participants cooperated significantly more with the black co-player.

Continuing the tradition of the experimental design of the 1970s, Friedman, Todd and Kariuki (1995) studied competitive and cooperative behaviour among urban middle class, poor semi-urban and rural 9 to 13 year old children in Kenya. Their main aim was to investigate the effect of social change on competitive behaviour. The children played in groups with the Cooperation Board Game (Kagan & Madsen, 1972). The reward structure was altered during the game from common/group to individual reward and its effect on children's game strategy was registered. As predicted, the urban middle class children living in Nairobi were more competitive than the rural ones. With a change from group to individual reward, urban children competed in a non-adaptive manner: they stopped cooperating as an effect of the competitive reward structure therefore they were totally unable to perform the task. These children behaved just like their peers with similar social background in the USA and elsewhere (e. g. Shapira & Madsen, 1969; Madsen & Shapira, 1970; Eliram & Schwarzwald, 1987) and their behaviour was explained by the internalization of modern, more individualistic and achievement-oriented values. Contrary to expectations, and unlike rural children from other studies, the Kenyan rural children also reacted with increased competition after the change from group to individual reward. But they were able to recognize that this was non-effective and could return to cooperation in the last trial, controlling their competitiveness. Another non-expected result was the behaviour of the poor semi-urban children: instead of exhibiting an "in-between" behavioural strategy among the urban and rural group, they seemed to play the most cooperatively, showing steady increase in performance over the trials, and were not affected by the reward change, exhibiting the ability to control the 'impulse of competition'. They played in a quiet, consistently cooperative manner. Beyond the influence of traditional cooperative values deriving still from their rural background, their reaction was explained by the authors with the lower-class urban poor attitude characterized by submissiveness, passivity and cautiousness (Madsen, 1967), which can be adaptive, in their view, in a hostile urban social environment.

The experimental studies also looked for sex differences in competitiveness. According to a meta-analysis and cross-cultural comparison in child competitiveness, Strube (1981) found no consistent sex difference in non-Anglo samples, including one African study conducted in Kenya (Munroe & Munroe, 1977). This contradicts to child rearing and developmental research findings and descriptions which emphasize the differences in socialization enhancing competitive behaviour in boys and cooperation and obedience in girls in tribal and more traditional and hierarchical societies (Bereczkei, 2003; Gregg, 2005). In Yauri, Nigeria in early childhood games girls play *sunana bojo ne* (My name is Bojo), where the song leader (changing through taking turns) stands in the middle of the circle with girls dancing around her and she falls backward into the circle trusting her friends to catch her. Boys however play a competitive version of ring toss with the goal to land a rubber ring around the neck of a bottle (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2008). A recent study (Gneezy, Leonard, & List, 2009) using an experimental task with adult participants, revealed significant gender differences in competitiveness, comparing Tanzanian Maasai and Indian Khasi samples. The Maasai represent a patriarchal society whereas the Khasi are matrilineal. Maasai men opted to compete almost twice as much as Maasai women. Amongst the Khasi from India this result was reversed: Khasi women chose the competitive environment considerably more often than men, and even chose to compete a little bit more often than Maasai men. The results suggested that gender differences in competitiveness are related to the actual societal structure. The Khasi matrilineal culture allows women greater independence and greater freedom and control over choosing economic pursuit and wealth accumulation than the patrilineal Maasai society.

While experimental studies tended to find cross-cultural differences in the level of competitiveness, Charlesworth's (1996) widely known experiment with 4-8 years old children from four cultures (black South African, Indian, Malaysian and American), accentuates that being able to combine competition with cooperative behaviour is a universally successful competitive strategy in competing for limited resources. In the experimental design a group of four children were given the opportunity to view a cartoon (the resource). The situation was designed to allow only one child at a time to watch the cartoon, while two children had to help make the cartoon available to this child for viewing, thereby relegating the fourth child to a bystander position. In each group those children had the longest viewing time who were able to combine working for the other member, i.e. cooperation, with the self-assertive expression of the wish to get access to the limited resource i.e. exhibiting a competitive behaviour. This finding suggests the presence of a culturally independent strategy that could be viewed as evolutionary stable.

A similar movie watching design was used by Liddell and McConville (1997) to examine competitive behaviour in resource utilisation among 14-16 year old South African black adolescents from violent township areas. A developmental trend was found that older adolescents were willing to share more, i.e. they became more cooperative. This is an opposite tendency that has been found among western children who, according to the studies, become more competitive with age (Stingle & Cook, 1985). In this study, instead of one, two groups of dominant (most successful) strategies could be distinguished. There was the 'dominant carer' group, those adolescents who combined competition and cooperation successfully, similar to Charlesworth's (1996) children. They were able to access the movie more frequently than others but they were also above-average helpers. The other group consisted of the 'dominant individualists' who achieved their goal using a totally different strategy. They were above average on resource utilization frequency but they were below average helpers. Far more adolescents from violent township areas around Johannesburg belonged to this latter group than to the 'dominant carer' group proving that in peaceful and in violent contexts different competitive strategies may be adaptive and may ensure access to the aimed for resources. This is in spite of the fact that traditional socialisation practices through much of Africa reinforce the development of co-operative dependencies rather than competition (Ajila & Olowu, 1992).

The experimental studies indicate that, similar to cross-cultural studies elsewhere, there is a complex set of factors that determine cooperative and competitive social orientations in sub-Saharan Africa as well. African children and adults living in more westernized urban environment seem to be more competitive and more sensitive to individual rewards reflecting social change. Children's different competitive and cooperative strategies to get access to a scarce resource can be mediated by what is considered adaptive in their immediate living area.

Cultural dimensions as an interpretative framework of competitive and cooperative behaviour in Africa

Cultural dimensions have been used to describe, explain, and predict differences in attitudes, values, behaviours, cognition, socialization etc. (Green et al., 2005). Competition and cooperation have been interpreted along these dimensions as well. Competition together with independence, autonomy, self-reliance, uniqueness and achievement orientation has been a typical attribute associated with individualism (Green et al., 2005). According to Oyserman (1993), an individualistic perspective has a focus on individual striving, competition, and actualization of potential. Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988) measured individualism by focusing on self-reliance with competition. Being cooperative, on the other hand, has been associated with collectivism, higher interdependence with others, conformity with group norms and low competitive desire (Fülöp, 2009).

The distinction between horizontalism and verticalism (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) introduced a different classification in terms of competition and cooperation. Vertical individualism was closely connected with the wish to become distinguished and acquire status in individual competition with others, while vertical collectivism with emphasizing the integrity of the in-group and the support of competition of the in-group with other groups. Interdependence with others and a rich net of cooperative relationships, however, were considered to be the characteristic of horizontal collectivism.

Hofstede (1991) and Van de Vliert, Schwartz, Huismans, Hofstede, and Daan (1999) related competition and cooperation to the masculinity-femininity cultural dimension. Masculine characteristics like the importance of advancement and earnings were considered corresponding to the competitive social role, while femininity was partly measured by the willingness to cooperate with others. Cultures high in masculinity stress performance and mutual competition and in these societies men are more prone to manage interpersonal, intra-group and inter-group conflicts through aggressive competition than via integrative cooperation (Van de Vliert et al., 1999). High and low power distance was also connected to competitiveness and several studies proved that a high power distance, asymmetrical society reinforces competition as a mean to ascend in the hierarchy (Van de Vliert, 1998; Hofstede, 2001). High and low assertiveness as a cultural dimension (The GLOBE Study, House et al. 2004) also predicts competitiveness. Societies that are high in assertiveness believe in the value of being a winner and competitiveness as a mean to survival and prosper (Den Hartog, 2004).

Another cultural dimension along which it is possible to interpret cultural differences in cooperation and competitiveness is the interdependent and independent self-concept. Within this interpretative framework competition was connected with the independent self-concept, while being highly cooperative was considered as an affirmation of the interdependent self-concept (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Taking into consideration these cultural dimensions it can be postulated that people living in societies that promote individualistic values and socialize children to have an independent self-concept, that are more masculine and high in assertiveness, and are characterized by high power distance might be more competitive than people living in societies in which collectivistic values, the interdependent self-construal, femininity, low-assertiveness and low power distance predominate.

However, the assumption, that high competitiveness is a distinctive characteristic of individualism has been questioned in recent research indicating that competitiveness can be associated with individualism as well as with collectivism (e.g., Van de Vliert, 1998, Oyserman et al., 2002; Fülöp, 2004, 2009; Green, 2005; Green et al., 2005; Fernández et al., 2008). The notion that competitiveness can be present in collectivistic societies is emphasized by Basabe and Ros (2005, p. 217), when they write: "In less developed, hierarchical and collectivist societies, the relative scarcity of resources, a hard struggle for social survival, and acceptance of inequalities all impose strong in-group solidarity, generalized competitiveness and an emphasis on personal effort and reward".

The first studies related to individualism and collectivism showed a relatively homogeneous portrait about African countries, considering African cultures mostly as collectivistic. Hofstede's (1991) findings for instance showed collectivism and big power distance both in West and East African countries pointing to the direction of vertical collectivism implying intensive inter-group competition (about cultural dimensions in sub-Saharan Africa see also Peter Smith's chapter in this book).

Decades later Pirttilä-Backman, Kassea, and Ikonen (2004) wanted to study African forms of individualism and collectivism and used the Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995) and the scenarios of Triandis, Chen, and Chan (1998) to measure these dimensions and found Cameroonian university students to be more collectivistic than individualistic, however, the level of combined individualism was also rather high, but significantly lower than the level of combined collectivism. Unfortunately the authors did not present the results of the subscales that could reveal more direct information about competitiveness based on the vertical individualism and vertical collectivism scores. However, in the focus group discussions that followed the questionnaire phase, although students confirmed that collectivism characterizes traditional Cameroonian life, and the unity of the group, solidarity in the community are important values, they also stressed that modern social changes have given rise to individualism and competition. For example they reported that in the student environment everyone wants to be the best because as a result of Western influence and Western capitalism a person must be able to assert one's self in the Cameroonian society. According to the students, the new individualistic tendencies, however, are not yet completely integrated into traditional practices. Therefore, people may have to hide their individualistic/competitive tendencies not to be rejected by the community.

Schwartz's (2004) study on values included Ghana, Nigeria, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Later it was extended to other sub-Saharan countries like Senegal, Cameroon and Ethiopia (Schwartz, 2006). All of the African countries proved to be high in embeddedness and low in autonomy predicting interdependence within the in-group and being more cooperative than competitive. However, in Fernández et al.'s study (2008), that aimed to reveal the possible relationship between competitiveness and independent/interdependent self-construal, the two participating African samples, Ghana and Nigeria, showed one of the highest scores among 29 participating samples on the competitive attitudes scale. At the same time the country scores differed in the level of collectivism between the two countries. The respondents from Ghana were characterized by a more collectivistic and interdependent self-construal as well, while in the case of the Nigerian participants high competitiveness correlated with a more individualistic and independent self-construal. The African findings support that competitive attitudes can not be associated predominantly with Western and individualistic societies.

Developmental research comparing German and Cameroonian children's self-concepts (Chasiotis, Bender, Kießling, & Hofer, 2010) suggests that no univocal evidence can be found to underpin that the interdependent self-concept could be called more typical in Africa than a self with independent characteristics. Research results on achievement motivation, achievement goals and self-determination of adults from Cameroon, Germany and Hong Kong seem to support this. No differences were found between the three samples regarding the high importance of the self as a reference value in achieving goals (Hofer et al., 2010).

In the GLOBE Study, House et al. (2004) sampled business managers in 62 nations, including Nigeria, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and a black and white sample from South Africa constituting the Sub-Saharan Africa cluster (see also Peter Smith's chapter in this book). The GLOBE Study differentiates in-group (family/organizational loyalty) and institutional (organizational, societal) collectivism. Zambia, Zimbabwe and Nigeria were among the countries with the highest level of in-group collectivism societal practice, while black South Africa, Namibia and white South Africa fell into the moderate band. Institutional collectivism practice scores were high for white South Africa and Zambia and moderate in all the other African samples implying a more cooperative orientation both in the in-group and the organization. As a contrast to this, in terms of assertiveness Nigeria, black and white South Africa were among the highest in the GLOBE Study, while the other

participating African countries fell into the moderate band indicating a more competitive societal practice (Den Hartog, 2004). In case of power distance, all these samples except black South Africa scored high, again pointing to a more competitive societal practice (Carl et al, 2004).

In Basabe's and Ros's (2005) meta-analysis of Nigeria, Zimbabwe and South Africa was included. They used Hofstede's (2001) ranking in terms of individualism and collectivism and found that competitive, success-centred attitudes are more common in collectivist, hierarchical, materialist and less developed societies. They do not analyze individual country data, but because East and West African countries proved to be highly collectivistic in the Hofstede study (2001) it is possible to imply that competitiveness is high in the African countries participating in the study as well.

Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence to the relationship between masculinity and competitiveness in the sub-Saharan African countries because Van de Vliert's (1998) international data set includes only South Africa, indicating higher competitiveness of the South African male participants than the female, though.

This overview of the empirical data on competition and cooperation in African societies suggests that competitive and cooperative behaviour in the African context, as well as in other cultural milieu, might be determined by complex interactions between the different cultural dimensions and situational and individual factors, instead of being explained by only one or two cultural dimension (Schneider et al., 2006).

Competition in African organizations and in political life

According to an Afrobarometer study from 2004 (Afrobarometer, 2004) in 15 African countries, 66 percent of the respondents were unemployed, 12 percent reported being employed part-time, and only 22 percent reported possessing full-time paid employment. The same study revealed, that respondents of these 15 countries consider unemployment as the most important and serious economic problem of their country. Today's West and Central Africa has to face intense competition for jobs partly due to intra- and inter-country migration, especially from rural to urban areas (Beavogui, 2011). In South Africa (Carter, 2010) where the competition for jobs is heavy, it is not unusual for job applicants to deceive prospective employers with misrepresentation of their qualities and former experiences (Israelstam, 2011). According to Skinner (2009), the large scale unemployment and underemployment and strong competition on the labour market seem to be present in the whole continent and migration seems to be a response to the regional inequalities. Forced migration due to political crises and civil wars (e. g. Somalia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Burundi) and a trend for national migration legislation protecting locals from competition for jobs e. g. by restricting foreign migrants' employment characterizes several African countries (Skinner, 2009). Such an intensely competitive context can have more faces: it can be threatening, inducing anxiety, especially if characterised by destructive competitive processes (Carr et al., 1995; Carr, 1996).

The concept of motivational gravity (Carr, 1995, 1996) is connected with competitive strivings referring to the desire to rise above others and perform high. In countries of sub-Saharan Africa extensive evidence revealed a competitive organizational culture wherein those who might visibly want to move upward over their peers through organizational goal and task achievements are sabotaged by co-workers and superiors. Carr et al. (1995), in a study with managerial psychology students from Malawi, found that most of the respondents were motivated to become superior to others by high achievement, which may indicate what Festinger (1954) called the 'unidirectional drive upwards'. But they also expected that co-workers would pull them down rather than push them

up, and superiors would push them down rather than pull them up indicating contradictory forces towards high achievement and potentially creating cognitive dissonance in employees. Moreover, the respondents who had already industrial experience working as a manager were more likely to declare that one shouldn't encourage others to do better than him- or herself. The most frequent explanations of such discouragement were: "everyone wants to be No. 1", followed by "threat to own position". Motivational gravity was found to be present in Nigeria, Liberia, Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania as well (e. g. Blunt, 1983; Seddon, 1985; Jones, 1988; Kiggundu, 1991; Akuamoah-Boateng et al., 2003). Beyond this, the results of Pirttila-Backman et al. (2004) and Hofer et al. (2010) suggest the possible presence of a similar phenomenon in Cameroon as well. There is also evidence for the presence of push down effects, in the form of resisting sharing ideas with subordinates or undervaluing their capacities, as well as co-workers pulling down each other (e. g. Munro, 1986a, 1986b; Carr & MacLachlan, 1993; Bowa & MacLachlan, 1994; Carr, 1994). Expatriate employees had similar experiences in African organizations (Carr, Ehiobuche, Rugimbana, & Munro, 1996). Carr, McAuliffe, and MacLachlan (1998) emphasize that a highly competitive organizational context is not necessarily counterproductive, but the findings pointing to motivational gravity suggest that organizations in developing countries of Africa rather develop a destructive competitive ethos. The different forms of motivational gravity can be found outside Africa as well, but they do not necessarily have counterproductive effects. For instance in Japanese organizations negative motivational gravity is managed successfully (Carr, 1996a) because progress and higher achievement is being tempered by positive interdependence and a working culture where co-workers understand that individual achievement benefits the whole community and means a mutual advantage (Valentine, 1997). Intercultural comparison of Japanese organizations successfully managing motivational gravity and Malawian ones apparently failing to do so suggests that establishing a sense of positive interdependence e. g. by using traditional family metaphors in the workplace might be usefully employed in the African context as well (Carr, 1996b).

There are, however, indigenous competitive strategies to ensure winning or to handle those who excel over others. Half a century ago Scotch (1961) described that in competitive situations, like competition for jobs or between football teams, magic and sorcery were applied as strategies for winning the situation among urban Zulu in South Africa (e. g. different rituals and ceremonies and football team sorcerers – called inyanga – are supposed to help winning). A similar contemporary phenomenon in Burkina Faso is 'wak', the occult powers used to obtain protection or to gain an advantage in competitive sporting events (Royer, 2002). This encounter of the modern and traditional world and the changing African context is reflected in witchcraft signifying motivational gravity. Data on 100 psychiatric admissions in Malawi showed that 40 percent of the examined patients attributed their admission to witchcraft related to the envy of others (MacLachlan, Nyirenda, & Nando, 1995). Evidence from other countries also underpins the presence of fear of threatening and envious atmosphere in the workplaces and in the society. Beyond Malawians, Zambian and Kenyan employees reported that before taking up a higher position they sometimes go for a spell protection against the malevolent witchcraft, which may be performed by envious colleagues or friends (e.g. Blunt, 1983; Bowa & MacLachlan, 1994, Carr, 1994; Carr & MacLachlan, 1993).

The prevalence of motivational gravity in Africa has some respectable historical, societal and local cultural foundations, like traditions of tribalism, favouritism and racial discrimination (Machungwa & Schmitt, 1983), intergroup rivalry as characteristic of many organizations across Africa (Kiggundu, 1986) and ethnic nepotism (Mazrui, 1980). It is also possible that motivational gravity may arise as a collectivistic response to the expression of an individualistic/competitive attitude at work (Carr, 1996). Interesting coincidence with the phenomenon, that there is no word for *congratulations* in Chichewa language (Zambesi Mission, 1986), spoken by more than over 10

million people in Malawi and Zambia (Carr, 1996) indicating that recognition and appreciation of achievements if expressed are not done with an equivalent verbal form.

Intense competition is not only present in the job market and in organizations, but according to historical evidence of the 20th century, there is a significant presence of inter-group, inter-tribal, inter-racial conflict and competition for scarce resources and power in Africa. Many times they result in armed conflicts (Alao & Olonisakin, 2000). There are however only a few studies that examine scientifically the social psychology of such inter-group competitions and conflicts. Dumont and van Lil (2009) examined inter-group relations in the post-apartheid South Africa where racial groups represent important reference groups for social comparisons regarding economic wealth, which is still unequally distributed among these groups. One focus of the research was social competition /seeking positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1986)/ among dominant (white) and non-dominant (black and coloured) groups in the society. In case of the *dominant group* higher perceived legitimacy of economic differences led to higher likelihood of social competition while in the *non-dominant groups* the perceived illegitimate inter-group differences activated collective actions to improve their status position with social competition. Eifert, Miguel and Posner (2010) in their study, based on data from over 35,000 respondents in 22 public opinion surveys in 10 sub-Saharan African countries (Botswana, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), found evidence that ethnic identities and interethnic competition and conflict in Africa can be strengthened strongly by exposure to political competition. The closer a country was to a competitive presidential election, survey respondents were more likely to identify themselves in ethnic terms. According to these authors, ethnic identities are salient in Africa not primarily because they reflect traditional loyalties to kith and kin, but they matter for instrumental reasons: because they are useful in the competition for political and/or social power. Therefore the reintroduction of multiparty elections in Africa in the 1990s — widely celebrated as a positive development — may have a conflict - inducing downside as well, enhancing destructive competitive processes.

Summary

Competition and cooperation have been studied in Africa for almost eighty years now, starting with the work of Margaret Mead and her colleagues (Mead, 1937a). While there are still statements that reflect a dichotomic relationship between competition and cooperation such as Holdstock's (2000) who wrote in her book on African psychology that in Africa "Living is about co-operation and not competition" (p.70) as the different research approaches revealed, competition and cooperation are present in all scenes of life in the African continent as well, from family life to workplace and can take the form of both interpersonal and inter-group competition and cooperation. The anthropological studies carried out in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that competition and cooperation are intertwined and co-exist in tribal societies and also in the family relationships. Cross-cultural experimental social psychology studies indicate that African participants are either more cooperative than or equally competitive as their Western counterparts, but adults and children living in urban contexts in sub-Saharan African countries are more competitive than their peers living in rural areas. According to cultural dimensions, Africans are more collectivistic, they rather have an interdependent self-concept, however, they can be highly competitive at the same time due to scarce resources. In spite of these results, it is questionable to state anything general about the 'African' ways of competing or cooperating or about competitiveness in a particular country i.e. Zambia or Nigeria or Cameroon because there are a huge number of ethnic groups in each country. There are for example approximately 73 in Zambia (Nag, 1990), around 250 ethnic groups and languages in Nigeria (Omenugha, 2004), between 250 and 280 different folks and linguistic groups in Cameroon

(Gullestad, 2007). Country borders are results of political processes and do not coincide with the geographical location of tribes and different cultural groups. With such an enormous ethnographic and cultural diversity nation level comparisons are rather questionable. Also, as the urban-rural comparisons showed there is a massive difference in rural and urban settings as well.

What seems to apply generally is that the urban employment market is intensively competitive in Africa and the organization culture is characterized by destructive competition that manifests itself in negative motivational gravity. Traditional culture (e.g. belief in witchcraft, and the practice of sorcery) continues to exist within the modern competitive job market and corporate advancement structure. Natural resources (like e.g. oil, land) are in the core of competitive political conflicts, and they may appear in the form of ethnic, religious or border conflicts (Alao & Olonisakin, 2000).

Based on the overview of the research on competition and cooperation in Africa it seems that family and within group relationships, especially in the rural context, are characterized more by interdependence and cooperation, and competition among family and in-group members is more or less controlled by well-established cultural practices. Severe crises of vital resources i.e. food, however, can turn this into a cruel survival fight as well. Outside the in-group, both in urban and rural context, inter-individual and inter-group/inter-ethnic relationships are typically characterized less by cooperation and more by intense and fierce competition which may manifest itself in violent conflict.

The strong presence of both competition and cooperation poses the question how these relationships coexist and in what way their particular concept is culturally constructed in the different cultural groups of the African continent. There have been no studies that aimed at revealing the personal and cultural meaning of these two phenomena, therefore all studies so far pose the question of cultural validity. Anthropologist identified cooperation and competition in the observed behaviour when it fitted their concept of what it takes to compete or cooperate. The experimental studies had a very precise design and methodology that travelled without alterations directly to Africa from the USA without reflecting on the familiarity of the experimental method and situation to different groups of African children or adults and obviously represented those researchers' understanding about competition and cooperation. For a long time there have been no studies to reveal the actual relationship between the different cultural dimensions and competition and cooperation, the relationship was just implied. More recent research indicates that there are no simple connections i.e. individualism – competition, collectivism – cooperation, but rather there are culturally defined ways of in what context, in what form and in what way they are simultaneously present and co-exist and among what conditions they take a constructive or a destructive turn (Fülöp, 2004).

To identify the means of avoiding destructive competition and promoting cooperative and peaceful competition that could contribute to the further development of sub-Saharan African societies is a crucial task for social scientists and cross-cultural psychologists as well as politicians and economic experts and there is plenty of space for research in this respect in the African continent.

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