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Investigation of Comparative Judgement Regarding Job and Living Preferences

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"Non-industrial" (a)

"Small business, minor 3rd World town" (s)

"Middle-class job, 3rd World city" (m)

"High-class job, major 3rd World City" (hc)

"High-tech job, 1st World city" (ht)

Summary:
Subjects from various cultural backgrounds filled out a forced-choice questionnaire concerning different job and living conditions in the Third and in the First World. The investigations took place in Nigeria, Switzerland, Cameroon, South Africa and Germany. The preferences ascertained reflect attitudes on a scale ranging from very traditional to very globalised ways of living.

Objectives:
Investigation of lifestyle preferences of subjects in Third and First World contexts.

Methods:
Subjects in Nigeria (University of Ibadan), Switzerland (UNO, Geneva), Cameroon (Universities of Yaounde and Buea), South Africa (University of Limpopo) and Germany (Technical University of Berlin) filled out a forced-choice questionnaire. Preferences were calculated according to the Law of Comparative Judgement.

Results:
Indigenous representatives at the UN preferred a rural, non-industrialised setting, whereas students at the Technical University of Berlin preferred a high-tech job in a First World city. In all of the African investigations, a high-class job in a major African / 3rd World city top-ranked the preferences.

Conclusions:
Findings conform to the Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion. Within the "dominant-dominated" spectrum of cultures in the presently globalising world, subjects of a dominated cultural background show complementary / compensative patterns of lifestyle preferences in a dominated respectively dominant context.

Keywords:
Cultural Psychology, Comparative Judgement, globalisation, cultural dominance, Indigenous peoples, Third World, First World.

1. Theoretical background

1. 1 Motivational factors of globalisation

Cultural changes are evident in the presently globalising world. These changes, also called moderniza-tion, are effects of human behaviour and interaction. Human behaviour, in turn, is determined by cog-nitive and motivational factors. Thus, cultural changes go along with changes of cognitive patterns, which are interlinked with, and influenced by, processes that take place in the external context.

1.1.1 Origin of cultural dominance

Cultural changes are triggered by the overlap of hitherto separate cultural systems. By the encounter, the individuals of each system become aware of the alternative behavioural patterns of the respective others. These patterns correspond to cognitive elements. During the synthesis of the overlapping cul-tures, equivalent elements of either sides are weighed against each other. Those that are considered effective are approved, whilst the equivalent other ones are dismissed. Due to this mechanism, on the one hand, a culture is of a greater overall effectiveness, if it results from many preceding syntheses, since each time selection processes take place with regard to the elements contributed by the cultures going into synthesis with each other. On the other hand, a culture without such a record of syntheses in its history has not accumulated a comparable store of effective cultural - and, at the same time: cognitive - elements with their respective behavioural patterns. When a culture of the first kind (many preceding syntheses, high overall effectiveness) confronts with a culture of the second kind (less or no preceding syntheses, less overall effectiveness), an effect of cultural dominance results from this contrast. On the individual level, a person exposed to that dominance strives for strategies to mitigate the feeling of inferiority (Groh, 2005).

1.1.2 Symbolic Self Completion

According to the Theory of Symbolic Self-Completion as proposed by Wicklund & Gollwitzer (1982), an individual tries to bridge the gap between the ideal self, defined by personal goals, and the actual self, as realistically perceived, with the help of symbols, which are communicated, and which have the function of creating an impression in orientation towards the aspired, identity-relevant goals. The communication of the symbols can be of verbal, visual, or various other nature.

1.1.3 Attractiveness of the globalised world?

At first sight, it seems to be logical that people want to be on the side that is dominant. However, cognition enables us to reflect the processes of cultural change critically and on meta levels. The overall effectiveness of the dominant and presently globalising industrial culture only contains strategies that have been relevant in the previous course of its history; it does not contain strategies outside its scope. Indigenous cultures, in turn, have very specific effectiveness within their context with regard to knowledge and strategies, which the industrial culture does not have, like how to manage habitats and complex ecological systems. It can be assumed that the extent to which an individual feels attracted to the globalising industrial culture depends on his/her specific cognitions. Yet, it is often taken as a premise that people prefer the dominant / First World culture, without having an empirical foundation for such a proposition.
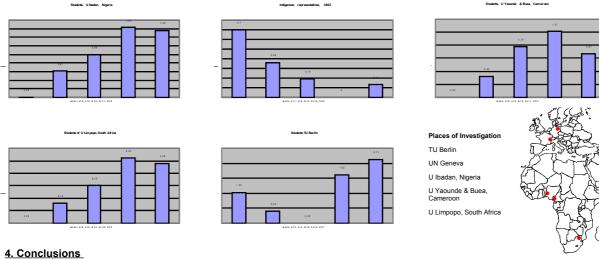
1.2. Law of Comparative Judgement

A useful tool for assessing lifestyle preferences is the paired comparison scaling according to the "Law of Comparative Judgement" (Thurstone, 1927; cf. Bortz & Döring, 2003). The basic idea of this approach is that repeated assessments are not identical, but normally distributed around a focal value. In order to gain more precision, each out of a number of objects is tested against each other of those objects. This is done with a forced choice, by which a subject has to choose one out of the objects that are each time offered as pairs.

2. Procedures

Characterisations of lifestyles, briefly describing job and living conditions, were rank scaled within a continuum reaching from very traditional to very globalised situations. The items were as follows: **(a)** "Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area", **(s)** "Small business in a minor 3rd World town", **(m)** "Middle-class job in 3rd World city", **(hc)** "High-class job in a major 3rd World City", **(ht)** "High-tech job in a 1st World city". The

questionnaires were administered to students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (N=63), to indig-enous representatives during a session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the UNHCHR at the United Nations in Geneva (N=22), to students at the Universities of Yaounde and Buea (N=109), to students at the University of Limpopo, South Africa (N=53) and to students at the Technical University of Berlin (N=52). In Cameroon, a French translation of the original English questionnaire was used, which had been provided by official translators at the United Nations in Geneva. Minor adjustments had been made for Africa, reading "African" instead of "3rd World", and for the University of Ibadan in item (m), "Ibadan" instead of "3rd World city". Preferences were cal-culated according to Bortz & Döring (2003).

3. Results

The data gathered from the African students show very similar patterns with the fourth item on the scale, (hc), being on rank 1 of the preferences, and the first item, (a), being on the lowest rank. Both the data of the indigenous representatives at the UN and the data of the TU Berlin students show very different patterns. In the UN data, the fourth item, (hc), is on the lowest, and the first item, (a), is on top rank. In the TU data, the fifth item, (ht), is on rank 1 of the preferences, and the third item, (m), is on bottom position.

Places of Investigation

TU Berlin

UN Geneva

U Ibadan, Nigeria

U Yaounde & Buea, Cameroon

U Limpopo, South Africa

4. Conclusions

The preference of the students at the Technical University of Berlin for a "High-tech job in a 1st World city" fits well into the theory of Symbolic Self-Completion, since it reflects a claim for a "high-tech" identity. Likewise, Braun & Wicklund (1988) had shown that among students, the striving for a professional identity is reflected in respective claims, which serve as symbols to complete the yet incomplete identity. On the other hand, "Living on agriculture in a rural, non-industrial area" being on rank 3 can be interpreted as the effect of the counterbalancing idea of a very different lifestyle, contrasting to the industrialised world. Similarly, that latter item being on top rank in the UN data reflects the claim of the indigenous representatives; anything else would be contradictory to their role. The claim is almost complete, and the attractiveness of the industrial culture is only reflected in item (ht) being on the second-last position. The data of the African students, who actually *are* indigenous, seem like an inversion of those, who have to represent indigenous peoples within a globalised context. The attractiveness of the First World is evident in the African students' data, and is only slightly counterbalanced by the maintenance of an African identity.

The application of the Law of Comparative Judgement shows that there is neither a consistent attractiveness of the First World nor a consistent deprecation of the Third World. Rather, preferences of specific job and living conditions result from various internal and external factors. The investigation of comparative judgement has proved to be a useful tool for the assessment of culture-related preferences. However, the results should always be cautiously interpreted, as they are determined by the specific individual-context constellation, in which goal-related, com-pensatory and other cognitive factors take effect.

Literature
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