

Relations with People and Relations with Things: Management of Human Resources in African Companies

JOÃO FEIJÓ¹

*African Studies Centre
High Institute of Social Sciences and Labor
Lisbon, Portugal*

ISCTE - Instituto Superior de Ciências do trabalho e da Empresa
Av. das Forças Armadas
1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal
joaofeijo@hotmail.com

Abstract. This article intends to analyze the viability of a paternalistic human resources management model in companies of the formal sector, where a logic of profit maximization assumes a more demanding dimension. Paternalism is used as a metaphor to understand the relations between employers and employees as modelled on relations between parents and children. The concept demonstrates the transformation of exploitation and authoritarian relations, guided under the imperative of regulation and profit, in ethical and affective relations, where the feeling of duty towards a protector predominates. A paternalist practice consists, in a general way, of attributing a set of affective and social benefits, in exchange for low wage indices, perpetuating employees' dependence in relation to the company. In fact, the model is criticized for not encouraging African workers' autonomy and social emancipation, promoting instead servility and submission to the authorities. This article intends to examine to what extent paternalist practices are adapted to sub-Saharan social and economic needs, compensating for the fragility of the Welfare State. Finally, it aims to reflect on the epistemological presuppositions of development conceptions.

Keywords: management of human resources; development in Africa; African companies; African entrepreneurs

¹ PhD student in African Studies in ISCTE - Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e da Empresa, in Lisbon, Portugal, financed by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT). The research is integrated in the project "Understanding Entrepreneurial Configurations in Africa and China: a four nation study," also financed by FCT (PTDC/AFR/72258/2006).

1. Exportation of management models

Since the middle of the eighties, after a period of strong economic centralization, the Structural Adjustment Programs defined that the State would cease being the main protagonist of development. For the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, markets and private initiative would promote economic growth. The liberalization of the economy, the privatization of public companies and the increase of foreign investment promoted an increase of small and medium enterprises in the private sector of the economy.

Until the eighties most development studies were centred on macro-economic policies, on the impact of state-owned projects, or on the creation and exploitation of labour classes in Africa. With market liberalization some attentions moved to the analysis of African companies and entrepreneurs. A private company becomes conceived not so much as a place of proletarian class exploitation,² but as an engine towards social and economic progress. The unsustainable urban growth that characterizes the great African cities, unemployment problems and the precarious urban economy have animated a new chain of researches on what the International Labour Organization defined as the “informal sector” (Forasteri 1999: 4). It is in this context that economic anthropology multiplies a series of studies about what is defined as “popular economy,” “spontaneous economy” (De Miras 1984; Morice 1987a), “moral economy” (Scott 1985) or “economy of affection” (Hyden 1983: 8). In general, researchers developed a particular approach to the world of African micro-companies,³ of informal small entrepreneurs, including African women companies. The changes in the discourse of the last few decades, which has vulgarized expressions such as ‘corruption’ or ‘good government,’ suggests that the priorities of the research agendas are changing again.⁴

² In accordance with Jean Copans (1995), former inquiries have confirmed that workers strategies lead mostly to self-employment and not so much to working class reproduction.

³ The history of the company has known distinct agendas around the African continent. In general, the available case studies are based mostly in West African countries. For Anthony Hopkins (1995) historiography placed the emphasis on the role played by white colonists – who generally had the best chances to start businesses – in unjust processes or inequality of opportunities.

⁴ As Hopkins demonstrates, economists of development are pressured to consider simple solutions to increment progress and well-being (Hopkins 1995: 38). Consequently, they tend to look for an ideal solution which after implementation does not usually correspond with initial expectations. Economists look for new ‘magical’ development formulas, involving generations of specialists, looking to a (re)discovery of economic growth prescriptions. The understanding of the processes of production of knowledge (in this case about

In a context of reinforcement of the company role as an agent of development, several of Max Weber's theories return to the scientific debate. New economic policies presume that markets liberalization leads to increased competition, and then to the adoption of new management processes, closer to the legal-rational type,⁵ which can contribute to the modernization of economies. Economic development would result from an attitude closer to a protestant ethic, which has founded the spirit of capitalism (Weber 1996).⁶ These premises followed the internationalization and the transference of modern management methods, de-

the development of the company in Africa) may take into account Thomas Kuhn or Imre Lakatos's epidemiologic theories. For Kuhn (1962), the work of the scientist reflects a deep adhesion to a theoretical paradigm. In a social-political interpretation of the production of knowledge, Kuhn considers that each paradigm implies the existence of theoretical, conceptual and methodological schemas, which are accepted for all those who share those points of view. Lakatos considers that any paradigm conceives a "hard nucleus," irrefutable for the respective researchers (Lakatos 1999). The Hungarian author uses the concept of the "protective belt" (Lakatos 1999) to express the commitment (unconsciously) established by the scientific community to not criticise the hard nucleus in their researches, in order not to disturb the paradigm.

⁵ For Max Weber (1991; 2003), Western civilization sped up, in the modern age, a trend of rationalization of innumerable domains of social life, with prominence for the State, for the Law or for the capitalist economy. In a bureaucratization context, affection and traditions had been excluded. Formalism and optimization of the means to attain results had been constantly perfected. It was in this context that Weber described the separation between the familiar communities typical of the domestic economy and on the other hand the communities of production, autonomous institutions, endowed with their own capital and collective responsibility. With a legal-rational inspiration, this bureaucracy exerted a technical influence on the company, on society and human life. Weber considered that the history of Western Law consisted in its gradual emancipation towards external influences; until it became an autonomous universe, dominated by competent specialists and organized by formal, clear and precise rules. Legality and legitimacy started to mean almost the same.

⁶ In accordance with Max Weber, the industrial revolution in Europe would not have been possible without the existence of a mentality oriented towards profit and investment. This economic attitude was a result of what was defined as religion of salvation (Weber 1996: 101). Analyzing the ethics of the protestant conduct, Weber observed that the faithful considered himself constantly watched by God and that the terrene life constitutes a sacrifice (through work), for a future reward in Heaven. The relation between the faithful and his God assumed a legal dimension, of inferior to superior. The protestant feels obliged to discipline his behaviour in order to become an elect of God, placing himself on permanent alert and in a state of anxiety. According to Max Weber, it was in this context that the development an acquisition instinct became possible. In this philosophy there was no place for leisure and an ascetic orientation became compulsive behaviour for the protestant. Promulgating work as an unavoidable value, this behaviour was compatible with the spirit of capitalism. There were created the mental conditions for an orientation towards an economy for profit, for a constant investment in production and for industrial progress.

veloped in Western countries, as well as the dislocation of a workforce carrying modern work habits. These new models are imported from materialistic societies, where the relations between individuals are subordinated to the relations between individuals and things.

As we will see, several anthropological reflections about management in African companies (Henry 1991; Hernandez 1997; Labazée 1995) have been unanimous in considering that, in this continent, relations between individuals are more important than relations between men and things. We are talking about relational societies, where a western rationality is applied, which seem to be incompatible with the local communities' forms of organization. Assuming a supposedly economic rationality, in this "*prêt-à-porter du développement*" (Henry 1995: 183), the proper Western preconceptions and prejudices are exported to African countries. In expatriated companies, multinationals and joint-ventures, the insufficient evaluation of cultural heterogeneity and the interaction between different cultural codes and values can provide a series of barriers, misunderstandings and other obstacles to cooperation and communication.

2. A specific African organizational culture – paternalist models of human resources management

Academic analyses of the African informal sector have been increasing, usually focusing on management singularities, at least in comparison with formal Western companies. Jean Copans provides evidence of a will to develop this sector, especially by international NGOs or even by some African governments (Copans 1995: 131). This has led to an increase in empirical researches about this 'new economic world.' While there are innumerable studies of the social actors' role in the informal sector (Henry 1991; Labazée 1991; Hernandez 1998; Lopes 2003), there still is an enormous scarcity of information about larger companies from the modern sector. Recovering the informal sector success factors,⁷ many authors have questioned the applicability of its practices in larger companies, which are more strongly integrated in the capitalist sector of the economy. Mamadou Dia (1992) explains the relative success of African informal companies' through their capacity to simultaneously adapt their organizational structure to the imperatives of economic effectiveness, as well as to the evolving social characteristics of

⁷ Hernandez emphasises the increasing employment capacity of the informal sector after independences (Hernandez 1998: 49). However, it is important to be prudent when analyzing this success, especially if we take into consideration the enormous dependence of African economies on international aid.

the community. In this context, Philippe Engelhard talks about osmosis of the African company with the local cultures (Engelhard 1987-8; cf. Hernandez 1998: 49).

Studying the resistance to the monetarist sector in Tanzanian rural contexts, and the role and respective importance of networks and social ties, Goran Hyden introduced the concept of “affective economy” (Goran Hyden 1985: 8). The affective economy refers not to the emotions and affections between individuals, but to the function of domestic and neighbourhood relations (for instance the exchange of labour force during harvests), of religious communities and other social networks, which support the individuals’ subsistence. The affective economy expresses the reciprocal solidarity logic, the welfare society, in contexts where state social intervention is hard to perceive.⁸

Although economic liberalization processes did not generate deep changes in peasants’ social structures, there were strong migratory movements to urban areas. Once in the cities, first and second generations of migrants tended to recreate, in the new contexts, their reciprocity systems, perpetuating behaviours and relationships typical of the affective economy. It is based in this cultural frame that individuals structure their social strategies to face daily difficulties: through group assistance or informal saving systems, which can be observed in numerous African cities. For instance, through *Tsima/Nitimo* an individual or a family unit, needing additional manpower, invites people from the community, relatives or not, in order to obtain support for a specific task. The reward is normally a collective meal or drink (alcoholic or not), which finishes in a party between the participants (Dava et al. 1998: 322-325). Another example is the *xitique* in Maputo, a popular practice of informal collective saving. It requires a regular deposit of an established amount of money, which is raised in rotation by each member of the group. *Xitique* makes possible the accumulation of money for the acquisition of several goods (such as refrigerators, television sets, furniture or clothing [Dava et al. 1998: 356]). It is important to notice that many of these social practices are not specific from Africa, but from several continents, including the Western world.

The affective economy presents a continuity with what Marcel Mauss defined as ‘gift,’ concerning economic relations. In *Essai sur le don*, the French anthropologist noticed that, in Melanesian, Northeast American and Polynesian communities, economic relations did not assume the form of trade of goods or services, but compulsive gifts (Mauss 1950). Several forms of consumption, participation in ceremonies, visiting or even destruction of valuable goods represent a struc-

⁸ This distinction between the monetary economy and the affective economy has some equivalence with the concepts of organic solidarity and mechanic solidarity of Émile Durkheim, or in the Max Weber opposition of modern authority and traditional authority (Durkheim 1977: 148-153; Weber 1991: 151-152).

turalized social obligation under a logic of reciprocity. To make use of a product, through an offer or its destruction, represents the basis for the development of alliances or the acquisition of social respect. Contracts were established on the basis of an offer of a product or a service and they carried several symbolic meanings. In the same way, to exchange a product in the African informal economy does not constitute a simple economic act, but a wider social one. The inherent objective of these communities' social behaviours is not economic accumulation, but reciprocity and respective social recognition. It is important to maintain some reservations in the interpretation of this perspective, in order to avoid three risks: Firstly, we have to take into account the conflict between social actors for the acquisition of resources of power. Conflict is in fact an important element in the understanding of social relations. Secondly, there is the risk of falling into a certain essentialism of African societies, eternally traditional, pre-modern and undeveloped. This critique arises from a linear perspective of the evolution of societies, in which development is seen as necessarily the one tried by Western societies. Finally, we must be aware of the consequences of an exotic perspective, especially if we forgot that these 'specific' African logics of reciprocity are, after all, an inherent characteristic of relations between people, at least in many communities.

Émile-Michel Hernandez (1998; 2000) uses the concept of paternalism to characterize the management of human resources models that emanates from the informal economy contexts in Africa. The term paternalism is used as a metaphor to understand the relations between employers and employees as relations between parents and children. Pinçon and Rendu explain that the concept tries to demonstrate the transformation of exploitation and authoritarian relations, guided under the imperative of regulation and profit, in ethical and affective relations, where the feeling of duty towards a protector predominates (Pinçon and Rendu 1985: 95). As Hernandez (2000: 99-100) demonstrates, the adoption of a paternalist model was widely analyzed, during the Middle Age and the Industrial Revolution in Europe, in contemporary France or inclusively in Japan (Maricourt 1996). It is a practice that consisted of attributing a set of social benefits to workers (for example feeding, housing, health care or even education), in exchange for low wage indices, perpetuating employees' dependence on the company.

According to Maricourt (1996), in contrast with Asian regions, Western countries experience a rejection⁹ of paternalist models.¹⁰ In the West, the entry

⁹ In the Western World, the concept of paternalism acquired a clearly pejorative conception, especially because it does not promote workers' emancipation and autonomy, perpetuating dependency relations.

¹⁰ Last century, paternalism in Europe faced two enormous obstacles. Firstly, the development of the Welfare State and the imposition of labour rights (social security, subsidies,

into industrial society was followed by deep ruptures and social disturbances, expressed in the emergence of a new ruling class, impatient to profit from its power. Maricourt classified the emerged model as “*père abusive*” oriented now to the interests of a bourgeoisie in ascension and not to its wage-earners (Maricourt 1996). Here, power is exerted in a predatory and self-centred way. In this context, the loser part considers himself a victim in the relationship and rejects paternalism, resulting in social contest, strikes and fights between social classes. The system is not perceived as legitimate and individuals may alienate their taxes to a welfare state – through bureaucratic and impersonal forms – in exchange for social protection (through education, health, subsidies, etc.). In this case, the state substitutes civil society at the welfare level, limiting the development of horizontal solidarity forms.

In African contexts favourable conditions for the maintenance of paternalist systems remain. Paternalism easily adapts to collective social contexts. In a system characterized by the weakness of the welfare state, companies assume a protective role towards its employees, providing the minimum of security and compensating for a precarious social context.

This model of reciprocity observable in developing countries is defined as “*père protecteur*” (Maricourt 1996). The system tends to be accepted by the majority of lower classes, who recognize an existence of mutual benefits, contributing to a climate of relative consensus and social stability. Compared to the state, the private company provides better welfare, which can be a source of employees’ motivation. The effectiveness of this model lies, therefore, in the stability of the relations’ chain and in the development of dependency nets. However, the discourse about social harmony in African societies deserves considerable skepticism, if we take into account the enormous social inequalities, the strong hierarchical structures, the non-delivery reputation of the African ‘Big Man’¹¹ (Médard 1992; Fauré and Médard 1995) or passive resistance phenomena and situations of “deaf conflicts” (Gomes 1997). In fact, we may question the models of reciprocity of the affective logic, analysing the inherent social tensions of these practices, which confers on them a complex dynamism. Following George Simmel (1995), it is not possible to conceive of a communitarian life if we exclude the repulsive

etc.) or social rights (health, housing or education) brought a series of benefits, which were, decades before, dependent on the employer’s charity and benevolence. On the other hand, if the paternalist management style aimed – through the concession of social benefits – to retain the (best) workers in the company, nowadays current policies tend to labour relations flexibility, in contexts of unemployment and high level of competition for a job.

¹¹ This is a term initially used by Sahlins in his analysis of the social systems in Pacific islands (Sahlins 1963: 285-303). The concept was recovered by other authors in the understanding of African societies.

and destructive dimensions from social relations. Conflict not only represents a way to preserve social relations, but also one of the functions that constitute them. Nevertheless, paternalist human resources management adopts some particularities at the level of recruitment, selection, remuneration and training or even fundraising, which may be described.

2.1. Recruitment forms - the economy of the social relations

According to Henry (1991), understanding the functioning of African companies requires an analysis of the relations that the respective agents – leaders and subordinates – establish with the community, concerning the adaptation to local values or respect towards sociability and kinship nets. In fact, African managers feel strong social pressures – from their families and social communities – in order to satisfy employment needs (Hernandez 1998: 52-55). A young student in Mozambique defined this phenomenon as ‘brotherism’ – although in Mozambique some job offers are published in the newspaper, the recruitment processes managers usually give preference to relatives, to friends or to friends of friends. For Henry, there is a relation between social actors’ behaviour in organizational contexts and the affective models of the domestic environments (Henry 1991: 461-462). This continuity is evident when observing the importance of social relations in the company or the collective character conferred to the employees’ salary – as Labazée (1995) demonstrates; the earnings of a worker are considered family propriety by domestic groups.¹² The author considers that this relation between the company and the community is reciprocally complex. If the social and cultural environment influences the organization of the company, behaviour in the domestic sphere are influenced by the relations and hierarchies in the company.

Labazée (1995) also considers the existence of other circles of dependents, larger than the domestic group, of the company. A second circle has its origin in religious institutions. The political and associative fields constitute the third circle where customers and dependents can be capitalized. In fact, postcolonial periods radically modified the relations of African businessmen with the political powers. Company success became increasingly conditioned by the existence of contacts and personal relations with the state or local administration. In fact, these agencies become entities of control of the accumulation processes (Labazée 1995). From the analyses of almost two hundreds interviews with Mozambican entrepreneurs and high staff from the ministries, the anthropologist Fialho Feliciano concluded that the capital accumulation of almost all the entrepreneurs

¹² As the author heard a succesful young worker living with his family tell his parents “*o que é meu é meu, o que é teu é nosso*” [What is mine is mine, what is yours is ours].

was due to the involvement and support of very important politicians (Feliciano 1996: 40).

In a scenario of communitarian pressure for a job, many companies feel obliged to operate with an excessive number of workers. Despite their low wages, these employees represent a heavy cost to the organization. However, it is important to reject any linear relation between communitarian forms of recruitment and an economic irrationality. Pascal Labazée (1995) illustrates different strategies of recruitment, where the pressure of the group is modified or even incorporated in the optics of the profit. As we will see, if family constitutes a crucial element for the relationship between individuals, family also has a utilitarian role for its members.

2.2. Remuneration

Employee wage indices in African informal companies can be extremely precarious. The salary can assume the form of social benefits in the form of meals and food, gifts or other benefits. Wages are usually reduced and can suffer constant variations, in ways unknown to the standards of the Western formal economy. Alain Morice (1987b) states that remuneration in these organizations offers a set of specificities - arbitrariness (dependent on the employer's will throughout professional practice) and instantaneousness (according to business results at each moment and to oscillations and financial availabilities). In moments of crisis, employees and community members tend to demonstrate understanding and solidarity towards the employer. This waging practice constitutes, in difficult periods, an important triumph for the company, conferring to the employer great management flexibility, preventing the reduction of jobs and consequent unemployment in the local community. Periods of crisis that would be fatal for many European companies in the formal sector, strictly dependent on the fulfilment of their legal obligations, can be surpassed in Africa through the adoption of paternalist practices.

In this paternalist model, social and symbolic benefits are crucially important. In her research on management practices in small industries or companies of the service sector in Mozambique, Ana Gomes found that leaders tended to consider the affective relation, proximity to or availability of subordinates, as a key factor for motivation, and for the success of a project (Gomes 2004: 289). Many interviewed by Ana Gomes, see companies to be continuous with the family (Gomes 2004: 293-294). The manager is perceived as a providing father, the last guarantee against poverty and uncertainty. These circumstances compel managers to look after the domestic life of employees, namely in death, illness (of a relative), in food supply and also in moral support (visits at the hospital).

2.3. Professional training

As Hernandez demonstrates, the employment of trainees constitutes a common practice in the informal sector in several regions in Africa (Hernandez 1998: 54). Research carried out by Harold Lubell and Charbel Zarour (1990) in Dakar indicates that 80% of the studied micro-companies made use of apprentices (trainees) (cf. Hernandez 1998: 54). In these cases, remuneration tends to be much reduced, and the young worker's family may also finance the period of training. The amounts recovered from the training can represent a considerable income for the company. While this common practice is incompatible with modern management standards, these customs allow companies to survive in Africa, despite weak productivity indices.

With regards to duration, training periods tend to not have a defined limit. While two or three years could be enough to develop the professional skills needed, trainees can stay on much longer as apprentices. The relationship between master and apprentice does not end if the latter leaves the company. Even if he opens his own business, the former-trainee will remain under the paternalist influence of the master. The indebtedness towards the one who transmitted the craft will not disappear, because 'familiar' relations had become the base of professional relations. As Ndione relates: "*lorsque tu as été l'apprenti de quelqu'un, tu le restes à vie*" [Once you've been someone's apprentice, you will remain that forever] (translation mine - J.F.) (Ndione 1992 cf. Hernandez 1998: 55).

The apprentice's recruitment must be understood as belonging to a complex system of rights and obligations. The manager has the paternalist duty to protect the apprentice, but when he hires a trainee, he enlarges his circle of social influence and, therefore, gains a higher probability of economic and social benefits. Once more, despite the fact that it seems irrational in a strict economic perspective, enterprises articulate their strategies with local needs in a way that allow the survival of organizations in situations of constraint and opposition.

2.4. Management of time

In many regions of the African continent there was no division between working relations and social relations. As we have been arguing, the labour market is not only a place of production but also a social relations market. For this reason, there is no formal standard for working relations, and workers' rights and obligations are not defined in a contractual way, at least not by Western standards. In this context, the use of a high number of workers leads to a confusion of working hours and domestic time. Family events and the constraints of personal life or domestic and agricultural activities are recognized by the community as reason-

nable justifications for absenteeism or weak tardiness.¹³ As Hernandez explains, the boundary between activity and inactivity is not clear, at least in the context of the informal sector of the economy (Hernandez 2000: 103). However, social benefits proportioned by paternalist policies can constitute management mechanisms which develop productivity and act as an incentive for the reduction of absenteeism. For many workers, the company constitutes the main source of welfare, in contexts where the role of the state is highly invisible.

With relation to employers, it is important to notice that their personal time (as well as their resources) are also not clearly separate of company time, in a spirit of commitment to customs and traditions. The enormous investment in personal relations durability makes planning and provisions a complex exercise. The coordination of changes is assured through the investment in durable personal relations. For Hernandez decisions are also supported with reference to traditional wisdom and proverbs (Hernandez 2000: 102).

2.5 The financing sources

Private banks' policies are oriented towards the concession of credits to companies that present good guarantees of success, which demands the elaboration and submission of investment projects, according to several legal and bureaucratic standards. These requirements are not fulfilled by most of the entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many micro-companies, and small and medium enterprises, especially in the informal sector, have a fragile financial structure and are not considered as deserving of credit by private banks. The development of enterprises, especially in the initial phase, is highly dependent on familial financial support, in a clear return of the social investment made by the company in the community (Labazée 1995). In Mozambican contexts, José Fialho Feliciano emphasised the importance of the family as the main source of financing of small and medium enterprises (Feliciano 1996: 37). Of 26 interviewees, 10 declared that they had received loans from relatives and friends, always without interest. The multiplication of alliances and partnerships assumes clientele logic – the in-

¹³ In previous consulting services in Maputo, it was possible to observe that some foreign entrepreneurs have realized the importance of family ceremonies for workers. The daughter of an employee of a company supplying civil construction materials in Maputo was getting married and the family organized a parade through the streets of the neighbourhood. The company was working on a very busy schedule and the employee asked the manager permission to assist the parade during working hours, without losing his assiduity bonus. Realizing the importance of the ritual, the manager negotiated a compromise: the parade changed course, passing next to the work store, and the father was allowed to be present during the daughter's ceremony for half an hour.

vestment in a relationship constitutes a guarantee of survival in precarious and uncertain circumstances.

If African companies seem to be institutions without productivity requirements, their rationality resides in the respect towards customs and local communities – disrespect would imply serious economic consequences. The research on African entrepreneurs' practices suggests, in fact, that capital accumulation implies the existence of different circles of sociability where one aims to obtain, in competitive contexts, positions of influence for strict economic purposes. Communitarian nets lie at the centre of an 'economy of social investments,' practised by African entrepreneurs with differing levels of competence. Local communities can represent 'linking operators,' according to economic interests. Wealth in men – in the number of dependents and customers – constitutes a condition for economic accumulation (Labazée 1995).

According to these views, it is important to render flexible Max Weber's proposals, because economic success results, many times, from maintaining a double relation with the community: a relation of 'investment' where entrepreneurs spend time and money establishing and reproducing its power in the community; and a relation of 'conversion' where these relations of domain are transformed into functional links for the company. Based on these reflections, we may discuss some culturalist interpretations, for which communitarian norms and values, typically African, constrain the economic development in the continent. The businessman's economic rationality does not seem at risk as a result of his social investments. In fact, communitarian ties constitute the main way to gain access to a socially constituted economic field.

3. The consequences of a paternalist management model

Despite the fact that paternalist management models can lead to servility and to extreme forms of submission to authority, Mamadou Dia (1996) admits that the simultaneous combination of hierarchic and protective dimensions can prevent indiscipline in the companies and limit social conflicts. Hernandez adds that this management style compensates for the innumerable state weaknesses regarding citizens' social protection or professional training (Hernandez 2000: 104-105). Paternalist practices transform companies into social communities as opposed to simply institutions of contractual relations.

Etounga-Manguelle (1991) gives a more pessimistic opinion. The author contends that this social system perpetuates attitudes of submission towards the authorities and to the Divine. Conditioning their future to magical and super-

natural forces, people limit their capacity to influence their own destiny. These aspects lead to the reproduction of other attitudes towards time or productivity. In fact, if in Western countries industrialization led to a strong rationalization of time, which started to constitute a finite unit around which determined action must be circumscriptive, in Africa it is action-related vicissitudes that determine the submission to hazard instead of the submission to time needs. On the other hand, these management models lead to the reproduction of a hierarchic social system, not contributing to the populations' autonomy and participation, perpetuating, therefore, 'subject' and 'parochial' political cultures.¹⁴ Compared to Western cultures, where social critics became a widespread shared value, in sub-Saharan African tradition and ancestors did not lose most of their respect. Paternalist practices strengthen the importance of the society's collective character, limiting the role of an individual. Strong (inter-)dependence between companies and families – which compels many organizations to operate with a high number of workers – transforms the technological modernization or the productivity increase into a delicate operation.

4. Conclusion

We can identify two apparently opposite approaches of African entrepreneurs and companies. The first is the development of a modern spirit of a new entrepreneur, submitted to the purely rational laws of economy. In this approach, companies would need to adopt modern processes and techniques (formal and organized accountancy, function analysis or performance evaluation, etc.) conducive to an increase of productivity.¹⁵ This perspective assumes the existence

¹⁴ Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) have constructed three ideal types of political culture - the parochial, the subject and the participative. The parochial culture is typical of traditional structures, politically decentralized and characterized by state invisibility in the populations' daily life. Individuals are not involved in political and administrative processes. The subject culture develops in contexts of authoritarian political structures and is strongly centralized. Citizens are aware of the normative rules imposed by the state, but they don't involve themselves in the decision-making processes nor do they have expectations of social participation. Social actors adopt passive and obedient attitudes before the law. Finally, the participative culture is characteristic of democratic systems, where individuals are politically active participants. Citizens recognize their rights of citizenship and the state's obligations to subject to the general will.

¹⁵ According to Dia (1992), the development projects that fall in these type of approaches are based on three great postulates: a linear and mechanic conception of history of development; a technological approach of management, based in the idea that modernization must pass through the assimilation of Western management methods and techniques;

of a universal rationality and has difficulties in dealing with any relativism. In reaction to this, a second approach is focused on Western management practices concerning the social and cultural realities of sub-Saharan Africa, which are responsible for the generation of social anomie. This new approach aims to analyze the relations of African entrepreneurs with local realities, with importance conferred to communitarian solidarities or the use of informal practices in the management of human resources. With an anthropological character – centred in a deeper understanding of social relations, inside and outside companies – these new contributions arise from informal sector analysis and intend to canalize the conclusions to the formal sector, where hybrid management practices assume a particular complexity. These approaches try to analyse the specific dimensions of management of human resources in Africa, as well as economic and communitarian strategies, in order to predict and to deal with constraints and difficulties. The new paradigm aims to criticize any determinism from modernity and falls into an absolute relativism of practices of management of human resources (Henry 1995). Both approaches oppose two clearly distinct concepts: modernity and post-modernity.

The transition from systems of gift to a market system presupposes the abandonment of traditional or pre-modern logics and an increasing economic monetarization. However, we are confronting a linear perspective of history,¹⁶ which assumes that developing countries have to follow the same processes of development experienced by Western countries after the eighteenth century. In *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama (1992) analyzes the way that a model of liberal democracy became popular and was affirmed as a final solution in diverse regions of the globe after the fall of the Berlin wall. This perspective ignores other possibilities of economic development, like those tried in the Asian Southeast countries (Ponson 1995). Fialho Feliciano criticizes this opposition between modernity and tradition because the question is not the substitution of one for another but its conjugation (Feliciano 1996: 38). In fact, tradition constitutes something constantly produced, recomposed and enriched by populations, in its constant updating of relations and social memories. This way, the supposed modern and traditional processes are constantly mixed in non-separable forms.

and an ethnocentric approach of culture, founded in the idea that all societies will tend to assimilate the values of developed countries, and that the refusal to accept these is a symptom of under-development.

¹⁶ It is important to note that all the ways of production and exchange are simultaneously social and economic. The capitalist spirit analyzed by Max Weber can not be found, entirely congregated or totally absent, in any community. In any society, power and technique, economy and ethics, mythology and knowledge are continuously mixed.

The 'modern' societies are always replete of miscegenation.¹⁷ For this reason it is important to analyse the transformation process, as well as the African societies' multiple forms of adaptation to monetarist logics. It is precisely from this question that a discipline of Sociology of African Studies makes particular sense, in order to analyse processes of comparison, opposition and transformation, always in a dynamic perspective. In fact, some supposed 'African' aspects are not essential and immutable, as can be demonstrated, for example, by a new African generation of entrepreneurs coming from a modern education system, who practise in African realities every day.

The main criticism that can be brought against culture-oriented analyses of African companies is directed at its reductive approach. Jean Copans (1995) shows that we can observe contradictory logics in African companies, related to capital and workers, state or ethnic groups, age or gender dimensions. This notion of 'plural company,' defended by Labazée, emphasizes the constant interplay between the model of a company – whose internal structures are imported or defined from the market constraints – and the subjective perceptions that agents construct about these very structures. These conceptions are recreated in the company (through negotiation processes and conflicts) at several levels: in recruitment practices, in remuneration levels, in the establishment of hierarchies or in production procedures. A non-critical culture oriented inspiration and the consequent depreciation of social and power relations are incompatible with a scientific and sociological analysis of human resources management in Africa. Sainsalieu (1977) demonstrates that organizations constitute contexts of production of culture and identities, in conflict or continuity with other social contexts such as family or school, in accordance with the perceptions of differences between groups and actors. Crozier and Friedberg (1977) understand the organizations as scenes of uncertainty, negotiation and competition, related to the dispute over resources such as time, knowledge, status or economic resources. The conflicting processes are inherent to any context, especially in contexts

¹⁷ In diverse consulting services carried out in the north of Portugal, in companies in the civil construction and training centre fields, evidence was found of recruitment practices directed to the manager familiar sphere, to the local community or to the dominant political party. In spite of the low indices for workers' remuneration and great inequality in wages, some employees invited the director to marriage ceremonies or even to godfather a child (for whom he became responsible for education and payment of a private college monthly fee). While it was evidently a social investment from the workers in order to capitalize interests and contacts for the family nets, for the manager it was clearly a clientele's intention to hire dependents who did not generate syndical conflicts, ignoring their skills, knowledge and competences (especially concerning innovation, dynamism or professional curiosity).

where the competition to access power resources is more intense. Sociability nets are constructed according to different strategies and social mobility expectations, which transform any company into a complex locale of disputes and tensions. If an enterprise constitutes a place where different personal strategies can cross, it is important to know the conflicts inherent in the logics of 'giving' and 'affection' in many African societies.

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