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PERSPECTIVE*

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Cross-Cultural Psychology: An Africentric Perspective

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Judith Gibbons is Professor of Psychology and International Studies at Saint Louis University, a 2012 Fulbright scholar at the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, and the editor of *International Perspectives in Psychology: Research Practice Consultation*. She is president-elect of the international organization, Interamerican Society of Psychology, better known by its Spanish acronym, SIP, and the regional representative from North America for the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP). Dr. Gibbons has published widely in international psychology, including a book co-authored by Deborah Stiles titled *The Thoughts of Youth: An International Perspective on Adolescents' Ideal Persons* and a recent book, co-edited with Karen Smith Rotabi titled *Intercountry Adoption: Policies, Practices, and Outcomes*.

Lilian Fai Wiysahnyuy hails from Kishong in Bui Division of Cameroon. She studied Curriculum Studies with bias in the teaching of History at the Bachelor's level. She holds an M.Ed in Educational Psychology from the University of Buea since 2007 and is currently a D. Phil candidate in the same field of study. Lilian Fai is a professional teacher presently serving in the Department of Science of Education at the Higher Teacher Training College Bambili-University of Bamenda. Her research interest centers on Developmental and Educational Psychology with overflows in Sociology of Education.

Lisa Schröder finished her Ph.D. in 2012 in Heidi Keller's department "Culture & Development" at the University of Osnabrück. For her thesis she investigated mother-child conversations about past events in various cultural contexts. Based on these results as well as the literature, she has developed a training program for German preschool teachers. Teachers are trained to use specific conversation techniques in order to create a language inspiring every-day life in kindergarten. Central to the conception is the consideration of culture specific conversation styles to encourage conversational contributions from children of various cultural backgrounds. At the moment she is coordinating an intervention study in order to evaluate the program. Furthermore, she is doing research in children's cognitive styles across different cultural contexts as well as in German migrant populations.

Noemi Büki is a young researcher of the Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology of Natural Science Research Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and a doctoral student in the Institute for Psychology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Her main research interest is the psychology of competition and acculturation in immigrant communities.

Oumar Barry is teaching psychology at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, Senegal. He is a seasoned teacher of various university-level psychology courses and has published extensively in psychology and child and youth development, and young people's welfare. He is into extensive networks and NGO activities for the benefit of children and youth. He has served as consultant on early childhood

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Peter B. Smith is Professor Emeritus of Social Psychology at the University of Sussex, UK. He is author or editor of ten books, including *Leadership, Organisations and Culture* (1988, with Mark Peterson), *Understanding Social Psychology across Cultures* (2006, with Michael Bond and Cigdem Kagitcibasi), *Handbook of Cross-Cultural Management Research* (2008, with Mark Peterson and David Thomas), *Cross-cultural Psychology* (2009, with Deborah Best) and more than 150 other publications. For six years he was editor of the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* and he is a former president of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology.

Pierre R. Dasen is Professor Emeritus of anthropology of education and cross-cultural psychology at the University of Geneva (Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences). He is the co-author (with J. Berry, Y. Poortinga, and M. Segall) of two widely circulated textbooks of cross-cultural psychology. His field of expertise is cross-cultural developmental psychology, and particularly culture and cognition. He has been a research assistant to J. Piaget at the University of Geneva, where he has been teaching for twenty years; he has also been associated with the Australian National University, Université de Montréal, University of Nairobi, and Universities of Nice, Fribourg, Lyon II and EHESS in Paris. He has carried out research in Australia, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, India and Nepal. P. Dasen has been influential in founding the Association pour la Recherche Interculturelle (ARIC), a francophone association for cross-cultural research.

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Relindis D. Yovsi received her Ph.D. in cultural and developmental psychology from the University of Osnabreuck, where she later worked as a Research Associate. She further pursued a Masters in Public Health Methodology at the School of Public Health, Free University of Brussels and started working as an independent professional in early childhood care and development as well as in research and development. Her interests are holistic early childhood development, cross-cultural infant and young child feeding practices, maternal and child health, parenting-child relationship, and the development and implementation of comprehensive early childhood development programmes.

Robert Serpell is Professor of Psychology at the University of Zambia (UNZA). Raised in England (Ph.D. 1969 Experimental Psychology, Sussex), he became a naturalised citizen of Zambia in 1978. His research has been published in a wide range of peer-reviewed journals, and in four books: *Culture's influence on behaviour* (1976), *Mobilizing local resources in Africa for persons with learning difficulties or mental handicap* (1984), *The significance of schooling: life-journeys in an African society* (1993), and *Becoming literate in the city* (2005). His main research interests are cultural aspects of human development, intelligence, multilingualism, literacy, assessment and intervention services for children with disabilities and their families, and educational curriculum development. From 1989 to 2002, he was Director of Applied Developmental Psychology at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, USA. He is a Fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, and Member of the International Executive

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Sharon Glazer earned her Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Central Michigan University, M.S. in Applied Psychology from University of Baltimore, and B.A. in Psychology from University of Maryland Baltimore County. Dr. Glazer is a Research Professor at University of Maryland, Center for Advanced Study of Language. Dr. Glazer was a Fulbright scholar to Hungary, Erasmus Mundus scholar to France and Italy, and International Studies Fellow and Global Studies Fellow at San Jose State University. Her research streams include cross-cultural organizational behavior topics, including occupational stress, social support, values, time, organizational attitudes, and organization development.

Sheri A. Nsamenang was born and raised in Cameroon. She began doing forgiveness related research when pursuing her Master's degree in clinical psychology. Sheri got her B.S. and M.S. degrees at New Mexico Highlands University. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Clinical Psychology at East Tennessee State University (ETSU). At ETSU she is a research assistant on a campus suicide prevention project called ETSU PEAKS (Prevention through Education Awareness and Knowledge of Suicide), which is sponsored by SAMHSA. Her research interests include forgiveness, spirituality, protective factors against suicide, rural mental health, and depression. Sheri's long term interests are to work with underserved populations and minorities, both in research and clinical work. She likes to be involved in her community. She is the Vice President of Shades of Africa, an organization for African students, and the Vice President of the Graduate Student Association in Psychology.

Tiia Tulviste is professor of developmental psychology at the University of Tartu, Estonia. She has a doctoral degree in psychology from the University of Moscow (1985), as well as a Ph.D. from Stockholm University (2002). Her research interests include cross-cultural variation in the associations between socialization values and practices and the development of self, speech and conversational skills in children, paying special attention to changing developmental contexts.

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Contents.

Preface

Introduction

Therese M.S Tchombe & A. Bame Nsanmenang

PART ONE: EPISTEMOLOGY AND CROSS CULTURAL RESEARCH

CHAPTER 1: Epistemologies in Cross-Cultural Psychology: an Africentric Appraisal

T.M. S, Tchombe, A. B. Nsamenang, J. Lah Lo-oh

CHAPTER 2: Cultures in the Biology of Human Development

A. Bame Nsamenang & Rita A. Akum

CHAPTER 3: Applications of a Cultural Psychology Approach in Two Studies of Human Development in Zambia *Robert Serpell*

CHAPTER 4: Emics and Etics in Cross-Cultural Psychology: Towards a Convergence in the Study of Cognitive Styles *Pierre Dasen*

PART TWO: RESEARCH METHODS AND TESTING

CHAPTER 5: Use of a Western Standardized Test in Defining African Perspectives

Oumar Barry & Marian Zeitlin

CHAPTER 6: Methodological and Ethical Issues: Thoughts and Reflections

Ronald Fischer

PART THREE: PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURES IN AFRICA FROM A PSYCHOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

CHAPTER 7: On the Distinctiveness and Importance of the Cultures of Sub-Saharan Africa

Peter B. Smith

CHAPTER 8: Lessons from Africa Revisited: Ecopsychological Pathways of Development

Heidi Keller

PART FOUR: CHILDREN' S DEVELOPMENT FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER 9: Socialization Models for Transitions From Early Childhood to Adolescence in African Migrant Families in Europe and America: *Therese M. S. Tchombe & Moses Mbangwana*

CHAPTER 10: African Perspectives on Gender Development

Deborah L. Best

CHAPTER 11: Childhood Play in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Lilian F. Wiysahnyuy

CHAPTER 12: Adoption and Fostering: Traditional and Contemporary Child Welfare Strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa

Judith L. Gibbons

PART FIVE: DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES: CROSS CULTURAL COMPARISONS

CHAPTER 13: Protoconversation and Protosong as Infant's Socialization Environment

Carolyn Demuth

CHAPTER 14: Different Faces of Autonomy: Mother-Child Past Event Conversations Across Cultural Developmental Pathways: *Tulviste, T., Tõugu, P., Keller, H., Schröder, L. & De Geer, B.*

CHAPTER 15: Challenges to Finding Similarities and Differences in Cross-Cultural Infancy Research: *Bettina Lamm*

CHAPTER 16: Cross-Cultural Forgiveness Processes in Cameroonian and American Young Citizens *Sheri A. Nsamenang & Ian T. Williamson*

PART SIX: CULTURE AND HUMAN SOCIAL CAPITAL

CHAPTER 17: Language Diversity, Bilingualism, and Multilingualism Across Cultures: The Quest for Bilingual Education: *Esther F. Akinsola*

CHAPTER 18: Perspectives in Indigenous African and Western Education and Learning
Therese M. S. Tchombe

PART SEVEN: APPLIED CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

CHAPTER 19: Competition and Cooperation in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Cross-Cultural Approach *Marta Fülöp & Noémi Büki*

CHAPTER 20: Industrial and Organizational Psychology in Western and Central Africa
Sharon Glazer

CHAPTER 21: Immigration and Parenting from an African Perspective: Implications for Well Being, Policy and Practice: *Relindis D. Yovsi*

CHAPTER 22: Cultural Factors in the Etiology, Expression, Transmission and Management of Ill-Health in the African Context: *Amina Abubakar & Fons Van de Vijver*

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***Abstract:**

The book on Cross-cultural psychology; an Africentric perspectives, seeks to clarify the imbalance in the potentials of mainstream's explanative psychological theories and epistemology to discuss the behavioural manifestations of persons in non-western cultures. This accounts for the problems of understanding differences and similarities manifested in human functioning accounted for by cultural variations. The universality/diversity debate has been clearly addressed. Though behaviour is influenced through biological factors the implications of experiences drawn from one's environment cannot be underestimated. As example, cognitive behaviours, can be well understood when findings of a study take into account the eco-cultural context and systems directing cognitive processes. At varying degrees, the 22 chapters exemplify the uniqueness of psychological processes related to cognition, perception, emotion, religion, language, parenting, and health practices. Thus the significance of cross-cultural psychology is its methodological approaches to explore diversity not deficits. In each of the various chapters, the richness of other cultures is demonstrated. The book lays emphasis on methodological approaches permitting the use of appropriate strategies to gain greater insight in cultural issues affecting development and human functioning having implications for testing as well as other applied fields of psychology. Western knowledge systems and research approaches should serve as a guide not as a major determinant of what and how research is conducted with Africans. Weaknesses in context-sensitive research methodologies therefore pose the greatest challenges for cross-cultural psychology in Africa. The book fills a gap in knowledge building and innovative thinking in cross-cultural research providing valuable information for policy development and developmental cooperation.

***Keywords:** Cross-Cultural Psychology, Africentric, Behaviour, Differences and Similarities, Research Method, Theories.

i. Basic Project Information

The 4th Africa Regional Conference of the International Association for Cross Cultural Psychology (IACCP) was held in the University of Buea, Cameroon from August 1-8 2009 under the theme: “Cross-Cultural Psychology: African Perspectives”. The conference was well attended and highly participatory and interactive. It featured over 109 Participants, including 07 Undergraduate Students, 50 Graduate students, 30 Young scholars, and 28 Senior Scientists in Cross-Cultural Psychology from 23 countries and all five continents. Though an African conference that it was, it attracted a lot of participants from Europe, Israel, the United States, Canada, Asia and as far as New Zealand. African participants were also numerous from Cameroon, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Uganda, Kenya, Senegal, and Rwanda. A unique feature of the Buea conference was its bilingual nature which featured interactions and exchanges in both English and French. The scientific program featured a pre-conference with parallel workshops for young scholars and graduate students on psychology programmes and research interests; and research methodologies in Cross-Cultural Psychology respectively. The participants at the Conference were of two main scholarly statuses, namely, emergent scholars and established researchers of both African and non-African origins.

At first, we intended to produce two volumes with our priority volume; one, targeting emergent African scholars, that is, Graduate Students and Young Scholars in cross cultural psychology. The second volume was to handle the scientific inputs to the conference of senior scholars in cross-cultural psychology. Due to financial and time constraints we decided to have just one volume drawing from emergent and senior scholars. In some cases we encouraged senior scholars to co-author articles with young scholars.

The Research Problem

We were keenly aware that African researchers in general, Graduate Students and Young Scholars in particular, face incredible challenges in the research arena and publication environment. An outstanding challenge is lack of Africa-centric texts to research orientation and scholarly productivity in psychology in general and cross-cultural research in particular. This state of the field does not only smother African voices but greatly limits authentic African contributions to the discipline’s knowledge base and timid presence in international cross-cultural research forums. We organized the Buea Conference with one objective, to obtain relevant data with which to craft an initial Africentric text that could begin to guide budding researchers such as graduate students and young scholars, on how to visualize and overcome the daunting field challenges to research productivity and publication from African cultural settings.

ii. Objectives

Objectives stated were:

- Articulate the proposed volume to rouse interest

- Focus attention on aspects of African life that are familiar to African scholars
- Enable senior scholars to contribute African perspectives to enhanced understanding of the psychology of Africans and to the science's knowledge-base.
- Record and share by putting together the very rich experiences and knowledge of the Cameroon conference.

iii. Methodology

For our methodology, we drew up a tentative content of the book based on the conference themes and assigned authors to specific topics. Some authors responded favourably, others declined that their hands were full. Listing committed authors and insisting that the focus should be on African issues, made the task more difficult and challenging. Our sampling strategies were both purposeful and convenient. The essence was to enable us achieve our main goal of producing a book from the conference proceedings directly or through other participation but which must address African issues. Having sorted out the work plan and proceeded with the technicalities of the writing plan, we identified two other members for the editorial board from Europe. We circulated the plan to them. They in turn circulated it to the executive of IACCP for information. Other scholars from the north indicated their interest. With these technicalities addressed, we then sourced for funding from IDRC, going through its rigorous administrative process.

The content aspects of the papers were well addressed. As the structure and organization including the procedure got clearer, other authors came up, thus we had 22 chapters with some chapters being co-authored. Articles were sent to the principal editor who edited and circulated to others systematically, so that the authors had only one document to work from. We had four rounds of editorial work with the group of four. Meantime the two Cameroonian editors met regularly, each session lasting three days for editorial work; reviewing and correcting before sending the documents out to the other two members of the team. After these sessions, we sent the chapters to the individual authors for review and corrections. We identified a publisher who put the work together, reviewed, gave technical suggestions and edited. We inserted all the corrections but for pictures and diagrams that were not clear, we referred back to the authors. After this phase of the work the draft book was presented to the IACCP academic community at the IACCP biannual conference held in 2012 in Stellenbosch in South Africa. The draft book was well received. The presentation was done by Professors Tchombe, Keller and Fülöp.

At this stage, the two local editors did a final review of the document and identified two international scholars in the domain to effect the last review. This was not possible, so we sent the book to an international scholar in Namibia Professor Zimba and another senior scholar Professor Yenshu in Cameroon. These edited for six weeks. When the edited documents were returned, only those chapters that had serious corrections were sent to the authors. Those with

very minor corrections we did. After effecting all corrections and the publisher having addressed all issues related to photographs and diagrams that were not clear, the texts were given out for professional editing more of language and we then did the final editing before going to the press.

iv. Project Activities

- We paid national and international reviewers who were to ensure that, the content of the work fits into the general international academic discourse, so that the assumptions do not challenge existing traditions without sufficient evidence.
- Paid for national review meetings by sponsoring transportation board/lodging and hosting of the meeting. These meetings allowed that discrepancies (editing, illustration, pictures) arising from individual chapters be identified and resolved. The meetings were also held for writing the introduction and the editorial of the book. Make decision on the cover page. Circulate to all authors for approval
- Paid for a professional editing for grammar, style, in text cross-references, consistency in spelling, presentation and hierarchy of titles.
- We paid for communications and internet

As concerns the production process;

Part of the production process; formatting the work in collaboration with the printer to conform to the imposition scheme and producing plate ready copy for the printer's Physical manufacture of the book:

Printing: 3 people for 5655 FCFA a day for 65 days

Binding: 3 people for 5655 FCFA a day for 65 days

Finishing of the book: 5 people for 5655FCFA a day for 65 days

Transportation of finished copies from producers, mailing of complimentary copies to contributors and fulfillment of orders of retailers were made. Two major challenges were faced; temporal and financial. The authors never kept to the deadlines and so there was serious delay at all the stages. Availability of scholars to review the document was another challenge. The financial challenge was experienced when the cost of publication increased because of our demand for the use of quality paper and other quality assurance perspectives. These left us at the end of the work at a deficit position. We found out that the major success of the book lies in the very rigorous editorial work and the seriousness of the publisher in accompanying us through the scientific process of the publication.

v. Project Outputs

Research:

- This work was basically book production where the editors coordinated and edited the chapters to ensure a rich and valued scientific document that reflects the African worldview. In this, the use of information communication and technology proved an

indispensable mechanism for our regular dialogue and communication. The flexibility with which interacted with the publisher was a strong point in enhancing the process.

Capacity:

- This project was a book project emerging from conference proceedings and other empirical and theoretical methodology. There was no training as such but orientations on the scientific expectations for the documents. The editorial board was made up of more female Professors (in the ratio 3:1), the male engagements in other aspect dominated the whole process. The book process created network of writers evident in co-authored chapters. The greatest achievement is that there is a book whose contributions are the input of great scholars in the domain, where the focus is Africa. This will go a long way to foster and bring to light African thoughts, processes and epistemologies. Knowledge expansion has a way of changing mind-set regarding social processes which directly or indirectly should help with responding to improving poverty of the mind, which is dangerous for people's mental health. Through the book process there evidence of collaboration through South-South and North-South.

Policy and practice:

- The book will contribute to policy and its practices in many ways if used. Now is the time for advocacy for social change with very important resources. Practices will be enhanced because through training and capacity building using the materials of the book in different domains, much transformation will be achieved.

vi. Project Outcomes

From the book, it is clear that important lessons for the field are inherent in African theories of the universe, cultural values, patterns of family life, and relational individualism. The knowledge and experiences shared by both scholars from north and south has opened a new window for relevant collaborative research.

vii. Overall Risk and Recommendations

As for risk, the concern was for quality of the book; from its physical presentation, quality of the paper used and quality, relevance and authenticity of the content. On this account the publisher did most of the setting and printing with his partners in the USA and in China. These quality issues which we have no regrets scaled the production budget up. As evident in our financial report, we are still owing the publisher. At least we are comfortable that each chapter endeavoured to articulate trends in the field from an African perspective, albeit in conformity to specific editors' guidelines.

As for recommendations; our first recommendation is that to ensure wider circulation of this book in order to share the rich knowledge within, it should be translated to at least two other European languages; French and if possible Portuguese or Spanish. Second recommendation is

that of training emergent and senior scholars on scientific writings, so they can compete well with their international colleagues and contribute to identifying the rich yet untapped research field in Africa. Thirdly, there is urgent need to develop research capacity to ensure the conduct of authentic research with reliable findings to inform policy.

Prof. Therese Tchombe
Project Leader