

**Preface to**  
***Developing autonomous and relational identities***  
***A culture-sensitive generative research framework***  
**(A 2011 Bellagio Residency Project)**

**By**

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This book is about how I am feeling my way into academia but more about efforts to contribute to understanding of human development and wellbeing in global perspective, from an Africentric positioning. The first milestone of my faultful scholarly expedition was *Human development in cultural context: A third world perspective* (1992) written when I was a Fogarty Fellow in developmental research at the prestigious U.S. NICHD in Bethesda, Maryland. Dr. Michael Lamb's Foreword to that book characterized it "... the first time, a social scientist from a non-Western country has provided a systematic and complete account of human development that is sensitive to the needs, interests, and ecologies of non-Western cultures and individuals" (Lamb, 1992). I hope other human development scholars have added to this initial contribution! My second book – *Cultures of human development and education: Challenge to growing up African* (2004) was completed during a resident fellowship (2002-2003) at the Center for Advanced Study of Behavioral Development (CASBS) at Stanford University.

I am delighted to have completed *Developing autonomous and relational identities: A generative research framework* within the precincts of the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center in Italy, a gorgeous but serene first-rate academic-prompting facility. The utter splendor and allure of the Bellagio Center has not wiped out my regret and hurt for not having filled the gap I identified almost two decades earlier: outsourcing the evidence to validate the stages of

social ontogeny (Nsamenang, 1992, p. 147). I thus failed not on incapacity but on account of a low resource-base.

*Developing autonomous and relational identities* is studied musings and innovative rethink of how to evolve an inclusive, culture-sensitive science of human development for the *wellbecoming* of the 7 billion people in the individualist and collectivist cultures of our common planet. I am privileged that my Bellagio Scholarly Residency coincided with the summit of The Bellagio Initiative (2011) on *The Future of Philanthropy and Development in Pursuit of Human Wellbeing*. I am convinced that philanthropic giving will significantly determine the scale, quality and direction of human development and human wellbecoming research. In point of fact, there will never be any science-based policy development and programming in low resource Africa, which will persist eternally in importing foreign benchmarks and principles for its human development and wellbeing planning, if philanthropy would not support future programmatic research on the Dark Continent.

I am an African scholar who sees the scientific method as the handiest tool to apply to ideas and practices about human development and wellbeing in all cultures. I position psychology as a universal rather than a segmented enterprise (see Moll, 2007). “The current fragmentation of psychology by identifying its ‘variants’ with particular peoples or geographic locales is unfavorable for evolving a coherent set of universally applicable psychological laws and does not support psychology’s acclaimed status as a true science of the human organism, a global species” (Nsamenang, 1990, p. 1). I seek understanding of African developmental trajectories and livelihoods, not for comparison with and not as an end, per se. My work is a journey into context-responsive, theory development and accumulation of databases sensitive to the African psyche, personality, and healthy identity. It is my wish to make a modest contribution from

Africa's knowledge systems and practices to scientific knowledge of universal value (UNESCO, 1999). It is from Africentric understanding and knowledge bases that emerging African scholars can muster the confidence to engage in informed human development policy exchanges and scientific discourses.

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