



# Lessons from Cross-Cultural Collaboration: How Cultural Humility Informed and Shaped the Work of an American and a Kenyan

O. Stephen Maitanmi

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Lessons from Cross-Cultural Collaboration: How Cultural Humility Informed and Shaped the Work of an American and a Kenyan**, edited by Hockett, E. and Muhanji, J., OR, Wipf and Stock, 2017, 140 pp., USD\$21, ISBN 978-1-5326-0915-2

The premise of *Lessons from Cross-Cultural Collaboration* is how the authors, Eloise Hockett and John Muhanji, have used the foundational components of cultural humility within various cross-cultural collaborative initiatives. Hockett is a tenured professor at George Fox University, Newberg, Oregon, United States, while Muhanji is the Director of Africa Ministries for Friends United Meeting (FUM) in Kisumu, Kenya. Cultural humility is an inestimable virtue that both countries have learnt over time in the process of implementing the concepts of peacekeeping practice in Kenya. The principles of cultural humility are so important to the authors that it informed their writing style, allowing the use of less formal academic language and the use of the authors' first names.

The book was not written by accident, but rather by divine inspiration, even though Eloise claimed that the book was initiated by John. It was launched at a point when the Kenyans suffered post-election violence, which reverberated through the entire nation. More than 1000 people were killed and thousands more displaced from their homes. Teaching of peace and conflict-resolution was therefore a matter of urgency in the country.

The authors began with the lessons needed to facilitate a cross-cultural collaboration called *principles of cultural humility*. Cultural differences may occur within the same organizations. These principles answered the following questions:

- Why should we pay attention to the ways in which we interact with others?
- Why is it difficult for many of us to engage with others in a positive way?
- What is so important about healthy and positive interactions with those from other cultures that embody how Jesus interacted with all people throughout His ministry? (p. 1)

The definition of *culture* as described by the authors is simple and accessible: “Culture is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” (p. 2). This definition is supported by the Holy Scriptures in Philippians 2:3 and John 3:16 and can also be seen in the works of Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) and Livermore (2012). Principles of this definition of *culture* include:

- *Cultural humility and relationships*. This principle must be undertaken with others by spending intentional time with the people with the objective of knowing them and their families. It also involves breaking of bread together and respecting one another's culture (p. 5).
- *Cultural humility and intentional listening*. This tenet aligned with the scripture in James 1:19, which admonishes us to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Some of the positive reasons why the practice of the principles of being quick to listen and slow to speak is important follow: How often do I anticipate what others are going to say? How often do I try to finish the sentences or thoughts of others without allowing them to completely finish? How often am I formulating responses as another person is talking? Am I distracted when in conversation with someone else? (p. 12).

- *Cultural humility and addressing biases and assumption.* Both authors shared their biases and assumptions, especially with other cultures while growing up (p. 15).
- *Cultural humility with collaboration and co-learning strategies.* Despite potential danger in collaborations, true collaboration effectively combines the components of relationship building, being quick to listen and slow to speak, and challenging our biases and assumptions (p. 19).

Subsequent chapters explained the implementation of these principles. Chapter 2 discusses the peace curriculum for Quaker schools in Kenya. After several meetings and series of workshops between the George Fox University (GFU) planning team and Kenya delegates which consisted of four GFU and 10 Kenyan's participants, the purpose was to examine the content, structure, and overall writing of the lessons. Volunteers from the United States joined both authors to facilitate their peacekeeping course. A third workshop occurred in August 2009 when Eloise came with more of her colleagues from GFU, including her department chair, dean, one faculty member, and her entire family. Later, Eloise asked another colleague, Sue, to accompany her and John on a trip to visit eleven different Quaker Secondadry Schools in Western Kenya.

The implementation of the curriculum was discussed in Chapter 3. Pre-implementation goals were set, which included: All schools using the designed curriculum will send key leaders to attend specially designed training session; the development team will emphasize different strategies for handling the lessons from the curriculum; the team will allow time for questions about the curriculum; and participants will be allowed to share personal stories about post-election violence. This pre-implementation was followed by peace curriculum implementation. Zadock, one of the Kenyan's delegates, worked with John in the actualization of the implementation. Fourteen secondary schools were selected in Western Kenya for the evaluation in the following order:

- Nine district day schools for overall students' test scores at lower levels;
- Four county boarding schools with more government support and higher student test scores at entrance; and
- One national boarding school and the highest ranking school in the country.

Ten of the 14 schools succeeded in the implementation of peace curriculum. Three of the remaining schools had minimal progress with future possibilities while the last school dropped out. That chapter concluded with a story from Western Boy's Secondary School. The peace curriculum changed that school from low academic standards to a high accountability.

Chapters 4-7 were further stories of implementations and challenges encountered. Notable among these stories were the Mt. Elgon school initiatives. Mt. Elgon is a mountain range found between the western side of Kenya and eastern side of Uganda, with a population estimate of 166,088. The education in this school suffered setbacks because of their abject poverty level, early marriages and childbirth, and other challenges in the community. This implementation challenge was met with the help of Moses, the principal, Eloise and John. The growth of the Quaker Church in Tanzania is another example of how leadership training at Friend's Theological College has greatly benefitted the Church in that country. Swarms of soldiers gave their lives to Christ through the cultural humility and spiritual disposition of Eloise and John.

The practice of cultural humility continues with Eloise and John even in the Village of Muliro where the majority of the occupants live in a slum. Eloise and John assisted Musembe Pentecostal Assemblies of God Primary School located in Bungoma County, a subcounty of Tongaren in Ndal. Classrooms were built (two permanent classrooms and four mud classrooms), and Young Friends Women groups were formed with the aim of supporting families and individuals financially. Other benefits included the supply of sanitary pads to boost the girls' attendance in school, a feeding program for students, and scholarships for potential college students. Eloise took her first group of teachers to Musembe to deliver a professional development workshop to the teachers at the school; a nurse educator was a member of the team. The elements of their service learning included: collaboration with specific community members; bringing theory into practice; and providing the opportunity for students to increase their cultural competency. Five senior nursing students were accepted to come to Kenya, and they were trained in the following areas: cultural practices, tropical diseases, and general medical knowledge. They performed exceedingly well in the area of nursing and healthcare, and help was extended to John's village in Kivagala, a county of Vihiga in Kenya, even though John felt very reluctant in involving the Americans because of his position as Africa Ministries Director. John organized annual sporting activities for the youths, which greatly reduced their idleness.

Throughout this book, Eloise and John shared the success stories of their collaboration. In the process, they both learnt lessons. To be precise, Eloise learnt to trust, listen, and process information before speaking as well as to obey instructions without questioning culture. She also discovered that relationship with Kenyans or persons from other countries is a priority. Meanwhile, John learned that education should not be a barrier to his service to people.

It is difficult not to like the authors, with their humility transformed into writing. However, the book has some weaknesses. The structure is a little unpolished (especially the latter parts, some of which could have been better as appendices), and there are some typographical errors. Nevertheless, the book provides valuable lessons into the principles of cultural humility in peacekeeping and absolute trust in God.

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**Maitanmi, O. Stephen** (PhD) is a senior lecturer in the Computer Science Department, Babcock University, Nigeria. His current scholarly interests are Cyber Physical Systems and Open Distance Learning.

O. Stephen Maitanmi

*Department of Computer Science, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria*

✉ [maitanmis@babcock.edu.ng](mailto:maitanmis@babcock.edu.ng)  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0217-0543>

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