Seeing Samaritans

Subversive Othering in Kenyan-Somali Relations

Peter M. Sensenig

Over the past three decades, the Somali civil conflict, exacerbated at times by military intervention on the part of majority-Christian nations,[1] has contributed to the international displacement of two million Somalis, mostly to neighboring countries.[2] Thousands of Somalis have also relocated to the United States and Canada, many of them received by Mennonite congregations in the United States, thus furthering the scope of deep Somalia-Mennonite relationships first initiated by Mennonite missionaries in Somalia in 1953.[3] But the most sustained Mennonite interaction with Somalis is no longer on the part of North Americans; rather, Kenya Mennonite Church is now best situated to act as neighbors, particularly toward the nearly half a million Somali migrants who have settled in Kenya over the past several decades.[4] The stories here demonstrate the profound challenges of hospitality across faiths, particularly when political struggles mix with religious identity. It is clear that Mennonites, both in Kenya and in North America, must respond to the reality that Somalis have become their neighbors in new ways. It matters what language is used to de-

Peter M. Sensenig has served in Zanzibar, Tanzania, with Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) since 2015. A member of EMM's Christian-Muslim Relations Team, he has taught ethics and peacebuilding at the Zanzibar Interfaith Center and in Somaliland, Ethiopia, and the United States. He has a PhD in Christian Ethics from Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA), and is the author of Peace Clan: Mennonite Peacemaking in Somalia *(Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016).*

1 Mary Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State* (New York: Zed, 2012), 5–13, 198.

2 Phillip Connor and Jens Manuel Krogstad, "5 Facts about the Global Somali Diaspora," *Pew Research Center*, June 1, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/5-facts-about-the-global-somali-diaspora/.

3 Peter M. Sensenig, "Somali Refugees Received by Mennonite Congregations in Pennsylvania, US: Two Case Studies," in *People Disrupted: Doing Mission Responsibly among Refugees and Migrants*, eds. Jinbong Kim et al. (Littleton, CO: William Carey Library, 2018).

4 Connor and Krogstad, "Global Somali diaspora."

scribe that reality, what stories are told to make sense of it, and the ways in which we locate ourselves in those stories.

I begin with a brief description of the relationship between Kenyan Mennonites and Somali Muslims within the broader context of Kenya's interfaith challenges. I then describe two identities that Kenyan Christians have ascribed to Somalis—*shifta* and Samaritan—and the movement from the former to the latter. I conclude by arguing that although identifying others as Samaritans has some shortcomings, it is an example of religious othering that plays a positive subversive role in articulating a missiology in the context of displacement. Central to this argument is the position that understanding Jesus's interactions with and representation of Samaritans leads to the following responses: (1) challenging religious assumptions, (2) inviting repentance, and (3) promoting mutuality between hostile groups.

I. Kenyan Mennonites and the Interfaith Context

Multiple high-profile incidents of interfaith conflict and violence over the past four decades have put Kenya consistently in the news. Three major terrorist attacks in the country—in 1980, 1998, and 2002—prefaced the the escalation of terrorist activity that began in 2011. This more recent wave, which has included dozens of grenade attacks on hotels, churches, bus stations, and other public places, has been conducted by al-Shabaab, an extremist group that controls the area across the border as well as most of rural southern Somalia, imposing a strict Islamic code and drafting young men to fight in response to the Kenyan military presence in Somalia. The most infamous of these attacks were the 2013 massacre at the Westgate Mall and the 2015 attack on Garissa University College, which killed 67 and 148 people, respectively. In Garissa, the attackers specifically targeted Christians, as al-Shabaab has done in numerous other instances in Kenya.[5] In retaliation, the Kenya Defense Forces have regularly rounded up noncombatants from Kenya's ethnic Somali population as a form of collective punishment, so that Somali Kenyans in northern areas say they fear their own country's military more than they do al-Shabaab.[6]

With each incident of terror the tension increases, and the response of Christians and Muslims to the hostility has not been coordinated well, even among

5 David K. Tarus and Gordon L. Heath, "Introduction," in *Christian Responses to Terrorism: The Kenyan Experience*, eds. Gordon L. Heath and David K. Tarus (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 4–6.

6 Max Bearak, "In Kenya's Battle against al-Shabab, Locals Say the Military Is Fighting Terror with Terror," *Washington Post*, November 3, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-kenyas-fight-against-al-shabab-villagers-say-the-military-is-fighting-terror-with-terror/2019/11/02/52d68f24-ef4d-11e9-bb7e-d2026ee0c199_story.html.

organizations that emphasize peacemaking, such as the Program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) and the National Council of Churches in Kenya. PROCMURA has good relationships with Muslim leaders in the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM)—with Sheikh Ibrahim Tullab and Aisha Fathi, a lecturer in Kisumu—but the team leader describes these Muslims as "common guests in consultations," reflecting the reality that these are Christian initiatives into which Muslims are invited as guests.[7]

A major part of the challenge of interfaith peacemaking is that Kenya has received many thousands of refugees from Somalia over the past quarter century. Many have ended up in refugee camps—in particular Dadaab in northeastern Kenya, which is home to a third of a million Somali refugees, making it the largest refugee camp in the world. An additional estimated sixty thousand have made their home in the Nairobi neighborhood of Eastleigh.[8]

The influx of Somali Muslims into this majority-Christian city has turned it into a contested space marked by "mutual suspicion, intolerance, negative ethnicity, job insecurity, real or perceived marginalization, discrimination, and security-related issues."[9] The truth of this hit home for me one day when I facilitated a workshop with Somali community leaders in Eastleigh in an attempt to understand and address the impact of the actions of Kenyan security forces in the neighborhood. Young Somali men, who lived in overcrowded and under-resourced conditions and faced regular harassment from police, jokingly referred to themselves as "Walking ATMs" because they could be stopped and relieved of their cash by the police at any time. It is difficult to imagine the impact of this kind of trauma; if the purported intention of these operations is to combat radicalization, they are having the exact opposite effect.

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7 Joy Wandabwa, Nairobi Team Leader, Program for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa, interview by author, June 11, 2017, Nairobi, Kenya.

8 Although Kenyan Mennonite congregations planted in Mombasa and along the coast constitute a growing point of contact with Muslims, to date the most important connections with Muslims for Mennonites and other Christians have often taken place in the Nairobi neighborhood of Eastleigh. In particular, the Eastleigh Fellowship Center (EFC)—established by Eastern Mennonite Missions in 1977 as a community center for Somalis and now operated by the Kenya Mennonite Church—brings Muslims and Christians together for language learning, sports, and other activities. On a single day at EFC, for example, one might observe a Somali community meeting, an English class, a basketball coach training session, and private tutoring all happening at the same time. EFC has also been host to interfaith dialogues, workshops on interfaith relations, and peace projects such as Mennonite Central Committee-sponsored peace clubs.

9 Willem Jansen, "Mapping This Book," in *Mapping Eastleigh for Christian-Muslim Relations*, eds. C. B. Peter et al. (Limuru, Kenya: Zapf Chancery Publishers Africa, 2013), 7.

In addition to these issues, the historical connection between Somali Islam and Sufism is being challenged by the inroads made in Eastleigh by the revivalist Wahhabi movement. The radical expressions of this form of Islam, added to pressures of economic and social insecurity, contribute to a sense that faith is "high stakes" for Muslims in Eastleigh.[10]

One expression of this intensity of religious feeling is the open-air preaching (*mihadhara*)—public events aimed at inviting Christians to embrace Islam. The sermons often follow the argumentative style of the South African polemicist Ahmed Deedat, and the format is informal, featuring Christians who have converted to Islam but who have little formal training. In some cases, sermons take the form of "debates" between Muslim and Christian polemicists, with the clear goal of dominating the other side with one's arguments.[11]

Peacebuilding requires a different approach. Esther Mombo describes the critical role of dialogue in building a peaceful society; beyond mere tolerance, dialogue is "frank exploration and self-criticism in a joint forum. It is also an attempt to give respect by listening carefully to the views of the neighbor regardless of the tensions that might arise."[12] Sometimes what is called "dialogue" in Kenyan Christian circles, however, actually consists of Christians talking among themselves about Islam, without the personal links that build trust. When such "dialogue" is practiced in the absence of the religious other or in the mode of trying to win the debate, the results are deeper distrust rather than peaceful relationships.

Yet in spite of high-profile incidents of violence, open competition, and negative press and perceptions, there is hope that transformative relationships between Muslims and Christians are spreading in Kenya. The work of peacebuilding is almost always low-profile and slow to gain momentum, but it manifests itself in surprising ways.

One such surprise occurred in December 2015 when al-Shabaab militants stopped a bus in northern Kenya, ordered the passengers off the bus, and demanded that the Muslims and Christians separate. One year earlier, in November 2014, a similar incident had occurred in which al-Shabaab had stopped a bus with sixty passengers—half Muslims and half Christians—on their way to

10 Willem J. E. Jansen, "Mapping the Contexts of Eastleigh," in *Mapping Eastleigh for Christian-Muslim Relations*, eds. C. B. Peter et al., 16–19.

11 Joseph Wandera, "Mapping Eastleigh as a Public Platform: The World of Street Preachers," in *Mapping Eastleigh for Christian-Muslim Relations*, eds. C. B. Peter et al., 26–33.

12 Esther Mombo and Samson M. Mwaluda, "Relationship and Challenge in Kenya and East Africa," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 17, no. 1 (January 2000): 38.

Nairobi from northern Kenya. After al-Shabaab separated the Christians from the Muslims, they shot the Christians to death.

So when attackers again stopped a bus at Mandera near the Somali border a year later and asked the passengers to divide along religious lines, surely the previous tragedy was in everyone's mind. The Muslim women quickly shared their Islamic garments (*hijab* and *buibui*) with the Christian women so that the attackers could not determine their religious identity. The militants then asked the men to disembark, but the Muslim men, in turn, refused to separate along religious lines. Sabdow Salah Farah, one of the Muslim passengers who was injured in the attack, recounted, "We started quarrelling with them and told them they were not doing the right thing. We then asked them to kill everyone in the bus or leave us alone."[13]

It was risky for all of them, as al-Shabaab's reputation for brutal killing was well established. But the Muslims protected their Christian neighbors, and one Muslim man even lost his life in the attack. David Zarembka writes, "What is amazing about this story is that all the Muslims—without consultation ahead of time—had to agree to this rescue plan with all the men putting their lives on the line. If some had backed out or if there had been uncertainty or dissention among them, the plan would not have worked."[14]

This incident represents a new benchmark for neighborliness, reflecting the best in both faith traditions—to love and obey God and to love and protect one's neighbor. It should prompt curiosity in Christians about the religious motivations for such astonishing charity in their Muslim compatriots. It also poses a real-life parable of the sort that Jesus might tell Christians today, culminating in the question, "Who were neighbors to those who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Luke 10:36). The answer, of course, is the religious other, whom Jesus posits as the character in the story worth emulating.

II. Shifta or Samaritan? Somalis in the Kenyan Christian Imagination

I draw a connection to the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Muslim-Christian bus incident because some Kenyan evangelical Christians themselves are, in fact, making this connection. Faced with the challenge of a religious minority whose roots are in a neighboring country, they have identified two categories of people for understanding Somalis symbolically. Interestingly, both categories make an appearance in the parable of the Good Samaritan: The first is *shifta*, the

13 David Zarembka, "Game Changer in the War against Terror," African Great Lakes Initiative of Friends Peace Teams, Report from Kenya #368, January 1, 2016, http://david-zarembka.com/2016/11/16/368-game-changer-in-the-war-against-terror-january-1-2016/.

14 Zarembka, "Game Changer."

East African word for bandits who take advantage of the more-difficult-to-govern areas of the region, one of which is the northern Kenya area close to Somalia. The second is Samaritans, a label that some Kenyan evangelicals have started using to identify Somalis, effectively replacing the perception of them as shifta.

The history of the country shows just how significant a shift this is. When ethnic Somalis in northern Kenya attempted to secede and join the pan-Somali region in the 1960s, the Kenyan government labeled the conflict the "Shifta War" as part of a propaganda effort. By the time a ceasefire was brokered in 1967, the violence between Kenyan forces and Somali militia groups had killed thousands of people. It was in this context that Kenyans, following the agitprop of their government, began to use the epithet *shifta* not only for secessionists but for all Somalis.

That some Kenyan evangelicals have found a new label for Somalis therefore indicates a positive trajectory in the relationship between the two groups. Although the examples cited in this article are from interviews with Kenyan Lutherans, they are also relevant to Kenyan Mennonites who, like their evangelical neighbors, are forced to respond to the cultural and historical shaping of the narratives about Somalis. They have been surrounded by the same official propaganda about Somalis as shifta, aware of the violence of militant groups and of the Kenyan response, and, like Kenyan Christians in general, find themselves in closer proximity to Somali neighbors than ever before.

So what is happening as Kenyan evangelicals respond to Somalis? The interviews of US American scholar of religion Ken Chitwood with Kenyan evangelicals reveal a change in primary approach to this conflict—from open hostility to evangelization. The reasons for this shift, Chitwood contends, include demographic changes, economic pragmatism, and religious motivations, including both evangelization and peacebuilding.

Chitwood offers an example of the use of the Samaritan label as a metaphor in the context of a conversation around Acts 1:6–11, a Scripture passage in which Jesus promises the disciples that they will receive power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. One Kenyan Evangelical Lutheran leader responded to this text, "Our Samaritans are the Somalis. Oh yes, we must receive power from the Spirit to reach them." This conversation took place as he and others were preparing to preach the gospel to Muslims through vision clinics co-sponsored by the Kenyan government and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Kenya. So part of the move from shifta to Samaritan indicated here is that while Kenyan evangelicals are still seeing Somalis as other, they are also viewing them as "fair game for redemption and capable of conversion and Christian morals."[15]

15 Ken Chitwood, "Somalis as Samaritans: A Glimpse into Christian–Muslim Relations in Eastern Africa from the Perspective of Evangelical Kenyan Christians," *Islam*

Yet another metaphorical meaning for the Samaritan label is an emphasis on kinship and reconciliation. In the words of one Christian truck driver who was near Westgate Mall when the attacks occurred, "Somali and Kenyan Muslims are still our cousins. Borders can divide us, but we are still extended family."[16] While this Kenyan man does not use the label Samaritan here, the language of family applied across religious lines can have a particular power either to set the stage for mythically based conflict, as in the competition for the status of favored son between Isaac and Ishmael, or to shape the imagination in a peacemaking direction.[17]

A third possible meaning for Samaritan as metaphor is articulated by a Kenyan evangelical Christian who referenced the Good Samaritan parable from Luke 10 to describe Somalis as potential Samaritans. He gave the example of a Nairobi cab driver named Sa'id, whom he had observed helping a woman who had been in a car accident, noting that Somalis "may prove to be a surprising source of God's blessing."[18]

These three interpretations correspond to three prominent New Testament depictions of Samaritans: (1) The first, in Acts 1, places Samaritans as a middle ring in the outward expansion of the gospel—as part of the whole world to which Jesus commissions his followers to witness. (2) The second, in John 4, records Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman, in which the kinship of Jews and Samaritans—and the transcendence of the Messiah over both religious systems—is central to the discussion. (3) The third, in Luke 10, is the most powerful example of the three of what I call "subversive othering." That is, if the parable fulfils its purpose, it undermines our theological, social, and physical territoriality, ultimately transforming our relationship with the other.

III. Is "Samaritan" a Helpful Label?

It may be clear at this point that my interest lies not simply in the fact that some Kenyan evangelicals are applying the label Samaritan to their Somali Muslim neighbors but in the deeper question of whether we should follow their example more broadly. In the context of displacement, what symbolic identities will lead to transformed relationships, greater justice, and more faithful communities of discipleship? Might we follow the example of these Kenyan Christians in seeing our Muslim neighbors as New Testament Samaritans, or in using other biblical

and Christian-Muslim Relations 28, no. 1 (2017): 70, 76.

16 Chitwood, 76.

17 Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12–15.

18 Chitwood, "Somalis as Samaritans," 77.

metaphors? In order to interrogate this question, we need to explore several related questions.

1. Symbolism and the Religious Other

First, is it fundamentally helpful to think symbolically about the religious other? Marc Gopin points out that most religions express a felt need to exclude at some level, to create some kind of other, and to maintain boundaries. Yet othering is not just a religious phenomenon; religion is an easy target for criticism, but othering is ubiquitous human behavior. Societies exist because of the othering that holds them together, and the reason for the separation of church and state is not that othering is always wrong but that certain forms of it are. The liberal mistake, says Gopin, is to lump all forms of othering together, alienating Abrahamic believers in the process.[19]

In other words, religious othering is a fundamental feature of faith and practice, shaped by powerful metaphors and images. What we need is not to discard such metaphors altogether but to find ones that are transformative toward peace and mutuality.

2. The New Testament Meaning of Samaritan

Second, what does it mean to apply the New Testament label of Samaritan to a people group? The Kenyan Christians quoted above touched on three of the major New Testament Samaritan passages: the Ascension Commission in Acts 1, Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4, and the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Two other passages also warrant note. Jesus includes a Samaritan in his healing ministry in Luke 17 and points out that only the foreigner said thank you. And, perhaps most significantly for modern interfaith relations, Jesus experiences Samaritan opposition at the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51–56). When the disciples wish to pray down fire from heaven to destroy the town, Jesus rebukes them. David Bosch sums these passages up this way: "All Luke's stories and parables about Samaritans give evidence to Jesus' refusal to embrace the vengeful sentiments of his compatriots."[20]

In short, the major significance of Samaritan references in the New Testament is that they represent a hostile relationship that sharpens Jesus's interactions and teachings. Samaritans indicate people who are close in belief to some Jewish groups, with lots of variations. At the same time, they represent difference, including the separate temple as a major issue—differences that were as

19 Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace*, 58–61.

20 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th anniversary ed., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 110.

much political and social as they were religious and ethnic.[21] Jesus's audience, including his disciples, must have found the parable of the Good Samaritan repulsive, since the Samaritan in the story "represents profanity; even more, he stands for nonhumanity. In terms of Jewish religion the Samaritans were enemies not only of Jews, but also of God. In the context of the narrative the Samaritan thus has a negative religious value."[22]

3. When the Samaritan Label Is Unhelpful

Third, how might applying the label of Samaritan in Muslim-Christian relations be *unhelpful*? One consideration is that several hundred people identifying as Samaritan live in Israel today, making it important to clarify that the symbolic label of Samaritan in the New Testament and its modern applications are not in specific reference to this present-day community.

Another consideration is posited by Chitwood, who identifies two ways in which the Samaritan label as used by Kenyan evangelicals can undermine the quest for peace with displaced Somalis and Kenyan Muslims. The first is using the label as an object for preaching, where "Samaritan" represents a lost and sinful person capable of responding to Christ. In such a case, the Somali becomes not simply the transcendent enemy but also a neighbor with whom one interacts for the purpose of conversion and redemption. Clearly, preaching is better than demonizing; yet, according to Newton Kahumbi Maina, an expert in Muslim-Christian relations at Kenyatta University, the ongoing competition in conversions and educational and political influence only exacerbates the centuries-long conflict between Somalis and Kenyans, and between Muslims and Christians.[23] As believers, we need something better than competition if we seek to build peace.

The second is that using the Samaritan label is necessarily territorial. Writing in a US American context, Al Tizon refutes the idea that a Christian nation can exist at all: "In fact, the idea of a Christian nation can only emerge out of a Christendom context, in which religion takes on a territorial dimension."[24] Christendom habits die hard, both on the right and on the left. When the Samaritan metaphor is superimposed onto this worldview, it only reinforces territorial assumptions.

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21 Ida Glaser, *The Bible and Other Faiths: Christian Responsibility in a World of Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 162–67.

22 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 93.

23 Chitwood, "Somalis as Samaritans," 76.

24 Al Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 24. For a more detailed argument on this, see Gregory A. Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation: How the Quest for Political Power Is Destroying the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

The operational Christendom mentality at work in US American Christianity can also be observed in Kenya. Forces of globalization, urbanization, and displacement have put Christians in closer contact than ever before with Muslims, rendering the shifta label less useful and demanding a new metaphor. Chitwood wonders whether the change from Somalis as shifta to Somalis as Samaritans will be more of the same kind of othering—that is, operating with the assumption that to be Kenyan is to be Christian and conflating Somali with Muslim (despite the fact that around 11 percent of Kenyans are Muslims, not only those of Somali background). In that sense, the metaphor serves to prop up the narrative that Kenya is a Christian country and is part of the contestation of power in the country. For example, Kenyan evangelicals involved in an eye clinic in a Muslim neighborhood were presenting the gospel to Muslims, trying to demonstrate that good health goes along with Christian faith, and administering the program through President Uhuru Kenyatta's "Kenya Vision 2030" plan. In other words, they were "attempting to convert attendees at the clinic not only to 'the way of Christ,' but also to the way of Kenya."[25]

This is a powerful criticism, as it lays bare the underlying territoriality implicit in this sort of othering. In this case, metaphor is a mechanism for exerting control over the political, social, and economic spheres of Kenyan life. As shifta, Somalis/Muslims are incapable of integration into Kenyan space. As Samaritans, added qualifications make integration a possibility—if Somalis/Muslims convert to Christianity, adapt to Christian norms, and lose or temper the qualities that make them other. In re-imagining Somalis as Samaritans, Chitwood states, these Kenyan evangelicals are attempting to define what it means to be Kenyan for the purpose of commanding the political, social, and religious space of Kenya in contradistinction to the Somali as Samaritan.[26]

IV. Samaritan as Subversive Othering

In light of these criticisms, what value is there in using the metaphorical label of Samaritan? Perhaps the first thing we should note is that this case study presents an opportunity for Christians in the West to learn from the African church, particularly as the displacement of Muslims makes increased interfaith contact more likely all the time. Paying special attention to interfaith practices in the Global South is important for a number of reasons. Africa, and the Global South in general, represents the growing edge of the Christian movement, and Africa is a major and unique meeting point for Muslims and Christians. New

25 Chitwood, "Somalis as Samaritans," 78–79.

26 Chitwood, 83.

global centers are developing, challenging assumptions about doing theology and mission.[27]

Tizon puts the shift in terms of the end of Christendom and the de-centering of the church in society: "Post-Christendom times call the nonwhite church, which has always been on the margins, to lead the way in defining the identity and mission of God's people today."[28] He emphasizes that global partnership across the colonial divide "will surely help to establish the church's credibility in the ministry of reconciliation. Postcolonial global partnership would demonstrate that the reconciliation the church offers to the world actually works!"[29]

Ghanaian theologian John Azumah makes the case that Africa is the only continent where the Christian and Muslim faiths meet each other as equals, not only in terms of numbers but also in the opportunities and challenges they face. For Christians in Africa, Muslims are not immigrants, aliens, or strangers; they are fellow citizens, neighbors, and family members. So talking about Islamic doctrine and practices is not treating Islam as a religious system. Rather, as Azumah puts it, "When we talk about these things in Africa, we talk about people. The most important thing in Africa is people, the second most important thing is people, the third most important thing is people. So, in a sense, Islam and Christianity in Africa are like two women married to one husband; they bicker, they quarrel, sometimes they fight but they just have to learn to live together. They cannot afford to see each other as enemies."[30]

Africa, including the Kenyan context where using the label of Samaritan as metaphor is being explored, matters a great deal in global Muslim-Christian relations because it offers some of the clearest examples of Muslim-Christian conflicts as well as interfaith hospitality. As the continent where Christians and Muslims coexist with struggle and with joy—as equals, neighbors, enemies, and relatives—Africa has much to teach the rest of the world.

This is true not only for Christians in general but also for Anabaptists in particular, as the first-, third-, and fifth-largest Anabaptist bodies in Africa are in the east—namely, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Kenya, respectively.[31] That the

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27 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

28 Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled*, 30.

29 Tizon, 54.

30 John Azumah, "Toward Cordial Witness among Muslims: An African Perspective; Through the Lens of Historical Relations," November 8, 2007, Fuller Theological Seminary Missiology Lectures (podcast).

31 Mennonite World Conference Directory Statistics, available at https://www.mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/mwc_world_directory_2015_statistics.pdf. Baptized members are as follows: Ethiopia–255,493; DRC–235,852; Tanzania–65,456; Zimbabwe is fourth; Kenya is fifth with 37,172.

continent of Africa is home to the most members (more than a third) of Mennonite World Conference , combined with the reality that many of the countries with the most Mennonites also have large numbers of Muslims—especially along the East African coast—means that East Africa is the site of some of the most significant Mennonite-Muslim ecotones, along with India and Indonesia.

Chitwood concludes his article by asking, "Finally, what is Western Christian missionaries' and entities' interaction with, and impact on, Christian–Muslim relations and evangelical Christian discourse in Kenya?"[32] This is indeed our question, and I posit that, despite the pitfalls, applying the label of Samaritan as metaphor to Muslim neighbors is a gift that we can receive from Kenyan Christians. It is an example of religious othering that plays a positive subversive role in articulating a missiology in the context of displacement.

By the term *subversive othering*, I mean to say that the power of the metaphor sneaks up on us, surprising us with meanings that we did not intend to appropriate. This is the function of a large part of Jesus's life and teaching—to surprise, to turn expectations upside-down, to make the last first. I contend that Jesus's response to Samaritans in the Gospels makes the Samaritan metaphor a useful one in our relationship with Muslims—in Kenya or elsewhere—for three reasons: it (1) challenges religious assumptions, (2) invites repentance, and (3) promotes mutuality between hostile groups.

1. The Samaritan Metaphor: Challenging Religious Assumptions

Jesus directly confronted Jewish prejudice against Samaritans, casting the hero of the parable as a despised other, while portraying two Jewish religious leaders as villains. Taking the story a step further, David Bosch argues that in many of the New Testament stories, "salvation is ultimately tied to the person of Jesus. . . . He is the Samaritan, who takes pity on his Jewish archenemy."[33] Applying the Muslim-as-Samaritan metaphor, therefore, would render it something like this: Jesus is saying, effectively, "To you I am a Muslim." Notice he is not telling his Jewish hearers to convert to the Samaritan religion but rather to allow their ethical thinking to be shaped by looking beyond their religious categories.

Cathy Ross writes that the Samaritan's act of hospitality "crossed ethnic boundaries, caused him personal cost and inconvenience and saved a life. When we see the other person, we see the image of God, as well as our common humanity, which establishes a fundamental dignity, respect and common bond. The parable in Matt. 25 reminds us that we can *see* Christ in every guest and

32 Chitwood, "Somalis as Samaritans," 82.

33 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 106.

stranger."[34] The Kenyan Christians who use the Samaritan label as metaphor are demonstrating a concrete step in the direction of seeing the image of God, common humanity, and the person of Christ in their Somali neighbors.

2. The Samaritan Metaphor: Inviting Repentance

Jesus's shocking use of a hostile category of people to illustrate a virtuous way of being challenges the narrative of virtue-by-belonging. One of the primary ways we violate the dignity of people of other faiths is to identify behavior by some in another group and then assign that behavior as essential to the character of the group. For example, when Ethiopia, with the backing of the United States, invaded Somalia in 2006, the tanks rolled into Mogadishu on Christmas Day. With the goal of regime change, the Ethiopian military was not taking prisoners, and many civilians were killed. A British journalist recounted that as Somalis looked around at the damage and the thousands of dead, their widespread sentiment was, "This is the work of Christian Ethiopians. Muslims wouldn't do anything like this."[35]

Of course, we know that some Muslims can and do kill, just as some Christians do. The error of essentializing groups as incapable of good or evil becomes more obvious to whomever is on the receiving end of the error. This story, for example, rightly provokes protest from Christians. But it also demonstrates that we must be careful to direct our scrutiny toward ourselves even as we judge the actions of others. And we must always compare the best of our faiths as a practical way to love our Muslim neighbors as we love ourselves.

Jesus's rebuke to his disciples who wanted revenge against the inhospitable Samaritans calls us as Christians to repent for our own anger and hatred toward Muslims. Jesus then tells his disciples to turn that anger into repentance (Lk 10:13–16), after which he proceeds to relate the parable of the Good Samaritan. The connection is unambiguous: Samaritans are the clearest illustration Jesus could find of the importance of channeling the impulse of anger into the fruit of repentance.

Kenyan Christians have ample reason to feel anger toward certain Muslims who engage in acts of violence and terror, such as the Westgate and Garissa attacks that shook the country and its people to the core. The fact that some Kenyan Christians are nevertheless using the language of Samaritans to refer to Muslims means that they are locating themselves, whether intentionally or not, in a subversive narrative that draws them to transform that anger.

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34 Cathy Ross, "Creating Space: Hospitality as a Metaphor for Mission," *Anvil* 25, no. 3 (2008): 171.

35 Eliza Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), 128–30.

3. The Samaritan Metaphor: Promoting Mutuality between Hostile Groups

In response to the *Common Word* document written by Muslim scholars to Christians, Rowan Williams comments that in the story of the Good Samaritan, being a neighbor is a challenge that "continually comes at us in new ways. We cannot define its demands securely in advance; it demands that we be ready to go beyond the boundaries of our familiar structures of kinship and obligation, whether these are local, racial or religious."[36] Such readiness implies not simply a posture but also preparation, the hard work of building relationships of trust and mutuality.

The challenges of building such relationships should not be taken lightly. In our work in majority-Muslim contexts in East Africa, my spouse and I have been confronted daily by profound economic injustice as well as by the deep chasm between differing cultural and religious worldviews. Perhaps even here the Samaritan image has something to teach us; in Matthew 10, Jesus instructs his disciples to go not to Samaritan villages but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, a glaring contradiction to much of the rest of the Gospel, where the good news is clearly intended for all people—Gentiles, Samaritans, and Jews.[37] Should Christians wrestle with this tension between mission to ourselves and mission among Muslims? Perhaps Jesus's reluctance to expand his ministry beyond his own people should inform our approach, give us an extra measure of care in how we present ourselves, and, most of all, infuse our presence with a deep and genuine humility. This is absolutely essential to mutuality.

It is easy for the familiarity of the Good Samaritan parable to obscure the startling fact that when Jesus is most directly asked what undergirds his ethic of neighbor love, he points to a person of a different religion. Significantly, Jesus was not supra-religious; he was a Palestinian Jew, so for him the Samaritan was as much the religious other as for his hearers. He is saying in clear language that his followers should be taught by those of other faiths, that we must learn from their examples as much as we intend to teach them.

Part of the argument here is that labels such as Samaritan that house subversive metaphors are not automatically or instantaneously transformative. We have noted that one can use the label without challenging the underlying assumptions of the status quo that Muslims are outsiders, foreigners, and/or potential—rather than actual—citizens of society. Yet this is precisely why the word *subversive* is appropriate; my contention is that if Kenyan Christians have primed themselves to see Somalis as Samaritans, when they are confronted with

36 Rowan Williams, "A Common Word for the Common Good," in *A Common Word between Us and You: Five-Year Anniversary Edition* (Amman, Jordan: Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2012), 202.

37 Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 68.

extraordinary acts of kindness and sacrifice—as in the Mandera bus incident—they will connect naturally to the heart of Jesus's intended meaning for the parable. We are meant to be each other's teachers and each other's students.

Just as the Kenyan pastor above referred to Somalis as "our Samaritans," should other Christians follow this example in seeing Muslims more generally as "our Samaritans?" The answer, I propose, lies in whether we use the word *our* in a possessive, territorial, or defensive sense or whether we use the word to mean something along these lines: To us, Muslims operate as the Samaritans did for Jesus's hearers. Our Muslim neighbors help us to turn our scrutiny inward, to humble ourselves, and to repent of our sins. They present us with the challenge of learning from people who are different from us, who become our moral teachers and exemplars. Our feelings of anger may be stirred against them, and we learn from Jesus to transform these feelings into love.

It matters then that we are steeped in the parables and deeds of Jesus and that we are asking, along with Kenyan evangelicals, how we fit into the stories—and how those around us fit in as well. The examples given in this paper come from the context of Kenya, as Western Christians have much to learn from East Africans about interfaith mutuality. But the lessons are pertinent to the West as well, particularly as Muslim immigrants become our neighbors in increasing numbers. A recent significant study of US American evangelicals shows that attitudes toward immigrants, including Muslims, are shaped enormously by regularly hearing the stories of Scripture, including the parable of the Good Samaritan, in addition to sustained worship or service alongside immigrants.[38]

The dictum *You are what you eat* is spiritually true; we become the stories we live into, and they shape us in ways we are not even aware of. This is the meaning and the power of subversive othering: we think we are telling a story, but it is rather telling us, turning a mirror onto our weaknesses and making us stronger along with the other.

38 Ruth M. Melkonian-Hoover and Lyman A. Kellstedt, *Evangelicals and Immigration: Fault Lines among the Faithful* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 160.