VICTIMS OF VICTIMS?

The Mimetic Crisis in the Holy Land from a Sociolinguistic Persepective

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INHOUD

1   INTRODUCTION: THE PLACE

Ppt

Last January, during a study seminar in Israel and Palestinian territories I took this picture. When we approached the Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation towering over the city of Nazareth, we passed a huge billboard with the text "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers (Holy Quran)".

At that time I had just started reading Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* and this statement, couched in terms of winners and losers expressed such a contrast with what I just learned from him: "We need to search for a way of living with, and acknowledging the integrity of, those who are not of our faith. Can we make space for difference?" (5)

What is the background of this statement – *is* it a statement? Or is it better considered an insult? Or a threat? A proclamation of faith? A warning? An advice? An attempt to persuade? To convert? Or just a message? Who is the writer of this sentence? Muhammed? Who did copy-paste the text of the Holy Quran? To whom is the message directed? The tourists down left on this picture? Under what circumstances did the billboard come into being? After the erection of the church the muslims wanted to build an even higher minaret - forbidden by the Israeli government. Who is responsible for the construction, do the Quran readers who own the tourists shops (also down left) agree with utterances like these?

How do we decide on its *meaning*, its *force*, its *effect*? Which are the presuppositions of our judgment? Posing questions like these is the 'business' of speech act theory, pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, sociology of language, ethnography of communication - for

convenience's sake I will head them all under the umbrella of 'sociolinguistics', shortly the study of the relation between langusge and society.

A few days after our visit to Nazareth we drove to the *West Bank*, to Bethlehem. And look here, a picture taken near the refugee camp Al Aida, in Bethlehem, the city of David where Jesus according to tradition was born, a graffito on a wall, from a few years earlier, "Pope you are welcome in Palestine".   -Ppt

How is this speech act to be related to the one in Nazareth? What about its illocutionary force? In Bethlehem's Church of Nativity we had a local guide, who reverently explained us the history, the objects of art and the symbols in church – I thought he was an Arab Christian, but when I asked him, he told me with a grin over his face "No, I am muslim, but please don't tell the others!"


The situation is extremely complicated, probably more than anywhere else in the world, because of many reasons. From my own youth in the Hague, in the fifties, I remember looking in an old atlas of my parents from 1932,

The region was called Palestine. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World World it became the territory of the British Mandate for Palestine.
In my own atlas of 1959 - used in the sixties during the lessons geography at our grammar-school - published eleven years after the establishment of the State of Israel, the geographical area is still called Palestine, although the characters ISRAEL
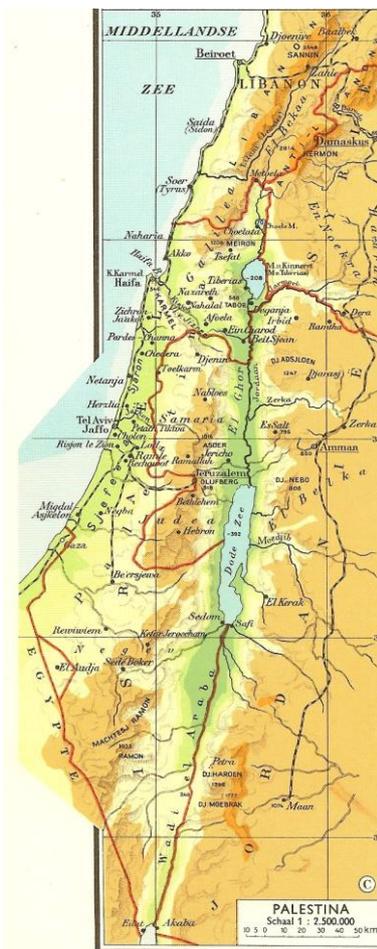
are printed on the map. The borders of the State are those of the so called 'green line', established between Israel and its neighbours (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. I remember having asked my parents after the Suez Crisis in 1956: what's the name over there, Palestina or Israël?

Last January, in Nes Ammim, a village in the Galilee, that confusion came to my mind when during the seminar the orthodox Jewish Zahava Neuberger-Keller presented herself as Palestinian by birth, as she was born in Akka, before the establishment of the Jewish state. Her father Aharon Keller, whose family for the most part was murdered in concentration camps, escaped Germany via Poland an Romania, and reached Palestina before the outbreak of World War II, where he became chief rabbi of Western Galilee. Neuberger-Keller herself wrote a dissertation on Deuteronomy in relation to the rights of aliens in the country and is nowadays involved in empowerment seminars for both Jewish and Palestinian women – which often runs up against a brick wall in the orthodox community.

Here is the atlas of the same publishing house again, used by my younger sister in the 70's, just Israel, without mentioning the geographical name Palestine.
If we have a look on currently used maps of the region in 'Western Asia' – only seen from colonial London it is called the *Middle* East, David told me – we discover easily that each map tells a story, "This land is my land". If you plan to visit Israel and you go the site goisrael.com you' ll get this picture of 'the greater Israel':


The most recent maps published by the government unilaterally annex Palestine to Israel while ignoring the existence of many Palestinian communities. Palestinian maps on the other hand lack a demarcation of the West Bank and Israeli towns such as Tel Aviv disappear from these maps while nearby Jaffa is listed. A map of Jerusalem I grabbed at the reception desk of

a hotel in Eastern part of the city, hardly mentions the names of streets in the western part, while the map bought in the mueseum shop of *Yad Vasjem* (the Holocaustmuseum), leaves many streets in the eastern part without names. Conflicting narratives.

Recently, May 11 in the daily newspaper *Haaretz* I read an article "Israel's tourism ministry is wiping Palestinians off the map", ending with the call "And it is time the international community made the simple request that Israel stop ignoring Palestinians and Palestine, at least on maps it officially produces".

The term 'West Bank', coined in 1950, is *taboo* for the Jewish settlers, who label the region as Judea and Samaria. 'The territories', neutrally spoken, were conquered in the 1948 War by Jordan and in 1967 by Israel, but in a move backwards they are called 'Palestinian' on this very well known map, used in Palestinian publications:
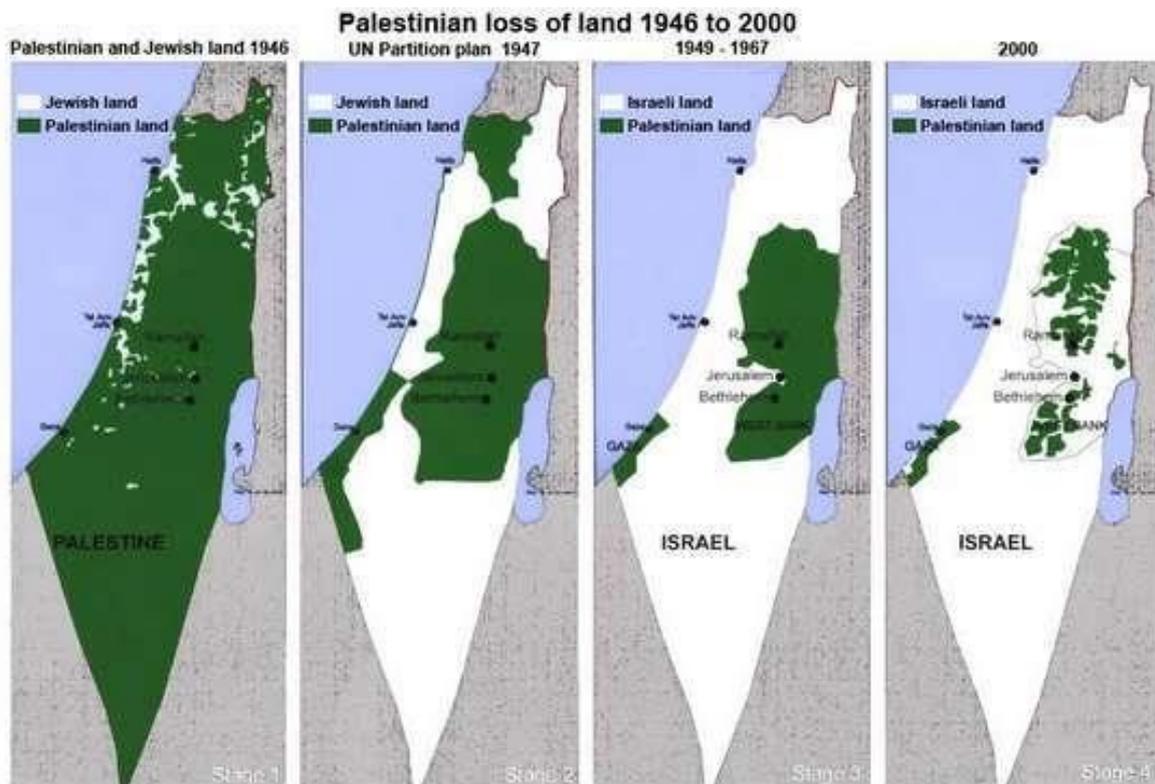
Now, to end this introduction, there is an apophtegm: after one week in the holy land, you write a book, after a month you write an article, and after one year you just listen. The past two years, during two study trips and a working visit I spent altogether one month in the region, so I am in a stage to write an article – or present a paper.

2   'THE SITUATION': A EUPHEMISM FOR MIMETIC CRISIS

To avoid choosing the names Israel or Palestine I prefer to label the region 'holy land', although I realize it is in many respects far from holy. Many people in the land have a multiple identity. I met someone who presented herself as Arab, "but I am a Israeli citizen, I belong to the Palestinian people." This woman was born in a Libyan refugee camp. Her religion was Christian, Greek Catholic. Palestinian youngsters, during a meeting of the Centre for Encounter in the Middle East last December in Holland,

talked about 48-Palestinians (living in Israël), 67-Palestinians (on the West Bank), Gaza-Palestinians, Refugee camp Palestinians in Arab states and Palestinians 'abroad'. And there are more differences.

It needs no saying that within the Jewish community differences and contrasts are not less: there is a huge gap between *sjabbath* celebration among secularized Jews along the beach of Tel Aviv and the *charidim* in a Jerusalem quarter of Jerusalem. Politically the views of the *settlers* on the West Bank and people working for B'Tselem (The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) show even sharper contrasts. And of course the Russian, Ethiopian, and Yemenite immigrants differ from Jewish immigrants from the United States or Europe, who on their turn differ from those, having lived in kibbutzim, urban dwellers etc.

And there is more variety within *Eretz Jisrael*: the Bedouins - or the Druze for instance, whose relation to the Palestinian Arabs is in some respects problematic. Their culture is Arab, their language Arabic, but they opted against mainstream Arab nationalism in 1948 and have since served in the Israel Defense Forces. Last year I was impressed by Druze journalist Riad Ali, who reported about his torture by Hamas in Gaza. I felt some sympathy for the Druze, but last January Christian Palestinian Elias Jabbour reported how his house had been set to fire by young Druze rioters. The Israeli police didn't show up, he got assistance from his Muslim neighbours. The position of Arab Christians in the country is very problematic: the Jews consider them as Arabs, Muslim Arabs consider them as followers of the crusaders' religion, pilgrims from the west look upon them as *pre-Enlightenment* believers. Theologically they often identify themselves with the Philistines in the Old Testament, which makes them anti-Jewish because they consider the Hebrew bible as Zionist propaganda – which it is to many West Bank settlers. Are they the scapegoats of the land? They declare themselves the first followers of Jesus and tell stories about his playing in Nazareth, but many of them emigrate - like Christians in neighbouring Arab countries. Contacts between the Christians from the west who build churches like that in Nazareth are scarce.

People in the region are separated and intertwined at the same time. It is a well kept secret that on the West Bank many Palestinians earn money by building Jewish settlements, like they did before building the separation wall. The Israeli *shekel* is the currency mostly used, just as in Gaza. But considerable differences between the main fighting parties exist about almost *all* issues. An example. When Palestinians in Ramallah name streets and squares after terrorists, label them freedom fighters and glorify them in their school curriculum, and then deny this is incitement, this is called hypocrisy. "But Israel is no less hypocritical", writes Yossi Alpher in the Jerusalem Post. "The incitement issue is rife with hypocrisy on both sides. It is exaggerated by both Israelis and Palestinians so as to excuse their refusal to negotiate and to "score points," particularly with the international community." Palestinians consider national Jewish hero Ben Gurion (numerous streets throughout Israel have been named after him) as a terrorist (or war criminal) – such as Alex Awad, a Christian Arab, in his *Palestinian Memories*. According to him (and many others) Ben Gurion had said in May 1948: "We must use terror, assasination, intimidation, land confiscation, and the cutting of all social services to

rid the Galilee of its Arab population". But did Ben-Gurion really say so? Awad gives no source or reference - google these words and you 'll find the quote is disputed.

The conflict shows clearly the imitative practices René Girard in *Les orgines de la culture* called the 'mimetic machine of reciprocal imitation'. When this double business is in operation, it stores up conflictual energy and tends to spread in all directions, because as it continues, the mechanism only becomes more mimetically attractive to bystanders – if two persons are fighting over the same object, then this object seems more valuable to bystanders. There is not only fighting over land, water, natural resources but also over interpretations of historical facts, language, religion, social positions, human rights. "Who was first, who is the real owner of the land, who is the victim, who is entitled to be afraid?" Fighting parties sometimes form bizarre coalitions, ultra-orthodox Jews joining stone-throwing Palestinians in East Jerusalem, secular Jews expressing ideological solidarity with Arab butchers in Christian villages selling pork (by the ultra-orthodox charidim considered an abomination).

Language and speech play an important role in the way different groups profile themselves in positive and the other party in negative terms. Almost everything in the region can be termed in opposites, in metaphors and metonyms considered pejorative for the other - which makes it hard to discuss facts, experiences, objects, territories. - The West Bank or the occupied territitories? The apartheid wall or the security fence? Independance day or Nakba day? Pioneers or invaders? Victory or ethnic cleansing? Gaza or Hamastan? How do you say 'Israel' in Arabic? Palestine, Israel or the zionist entity?

All mimetic conflicts together are labelled in one euphemism: המצב *ha-matsav* 'the situation'. It enables people, living apart together, to continue their daily life. From a mimetic viewpoint it is interesting to note that rival parties more and more push up their identities: the more they like each other, the more they try to differentiate. More secular Jewish boys long for *bar mitswa* to prove their identity, more calls for prayer from the minarets in Nazareth are heard. Among Palestinians the consciousness 'we are one people' is stronger than it has ever been during the Ottoman Empire. Rivalry reaches its heights in the claim on victimhood. In mimetic theory it is assumed this has to do with the concern for victims which stems from Judaism and Christianity. "Our society is the most preoccupied with victims of any that ever was" wrote Girard in *I see Satan fall like lightning*. The concern for victims has become an absolute value [ ] the unspoken dogma of political correctness. "And it has become a paradoxical competition of mimetic rivalries, of opponents continually trying to outbid one another." (En. 187)

In Israel this is an emotive issue, because of the shoah, of course: the identity of the nation is to an important extent rooted in the history of anti-Semitism for centuries, of pogroms and oppression in Europe, culminating in the murder in WW II of 6 million Jews. Since 1948 the construction of the new homeland in Palestine has been considered such a enormous achievement, that the very idea of Palestinians being victims of victims is considered abhorrent – although among Israeli *new historians* like Ilan Pappé it is no longer tabood. But precisely on victimhood and holocaust rivalry has begun so that model-obstacle relations occur and mirroring paradoxically leads to likeness. Girard (2001: 24) writes that mimetic rivalry starts as soon as we want to take away the desired object from our model, and make it our own.

The question at issue is *not* denying the holocaust (as elsewhere in the Arab world), it is about taking the holocaust by Palestinians as frame of reference: the *Nakba* was *our* holocaust, de

expulsions from our villages are just like a pogrom, like Awad (2008: 119) writes: "The 750.000 Palestinians who did flee lost all their land in 1948 and became refugees. Just as Jews in Europe were driven from their homes due to pogroms, Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and land because of Zionist ethnic cleansing."

The other way round Israelis – when accused of violation of human rights – refer to much heavier crimes by Palestinians, suggesting 'what are you talking about?' As the rivals vie with each other, so progressively they become doubles of each other; increasingly close, progressively undifferentiated: in their mutual fascination with each other, in their other-mirroring strategies, in their symmetrical behaviour. Double imitation arises when the model begins to imitate its follower, whereby roles are mutually interchangeable and indifferentiation is at stake. This happens in the Israeli-Palestinian antagonism – and it goes along with resistance towards the indifferentiation scheme, and attachment to the format 'I am good, you are evil'.

In this respect I found the recognition in the Goldstone report (the UN's investigation of the war in Gaza, published September 2009) remarkable that human rights were violated by both sides, putting an end to the good-bad format. Disgusting for those whose identity is rooted in antagonism: "He is a traitor to the Jewish people. [ ] the "Goldstone report is a defamation written by an evil, evil man." Jerusalem Post (31 jan 2010). But more remarkable, in the same newspaper, another comment: "He is the absolute best of the Jewish tradition. He stands up for justice, he stands up for the oppressed and he speaks truth to power - no matter who holds the power and no matter what it costs him. This is one of the great Jews of our time. Goldstone is the secular equivalent of a Jewish prophet, and by trying so hard to dishonor him, Israel and the Diaspora Jewish establishment have succeeded only in dishonoring themselves." (22 april 2010).

The mimetic crisis is all around, inside and outside communities.

3   SOCIOLINGUISTIC APPROACH

What happens when the pace of change exceeds the ability to change? Jonathan Sacks, in his *The Dignity of Difference. How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* writes:

> It is then that we feel the loss of control over our lives. Anxiety creates fear, fear leads to anger, anger breeds violence, and violence [ ] becomes a deadly reality. The greatest single antidote to violence is *conversation*, speaking out our fears, listening to the fears of others, and in that sharing of vulnerabilities discovering a genesis of hope.[1]

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[1] Sacks (2003): 2.

How to overcome fear? Sacks stresses the importance of the role of language and speech, referring to the performative utterances of the Oxford philosopher Austin. He distinguishes between utterances based on a contract and a covenant. "Covenant is the use of language to create a bond of trust through the word given, the word received, the word honoured in mutual fidelity."[2] I try to frame some attempts to overcome hate speech in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict within the sociolinguistic settting of *speech events*.

Generally it is worth noting that people use variety in language to shape their identity, which implies to make a choice – and this happens according to 'the systematics' of mimetic desire. In my view this variety is to be considered a positive good: differences do not necessarily lead to rivalry and violence in a shared moral structure. If each of us lacked nothing, we would never need anyone else. Rivalry and cooperation go hand in hand. The valuing of differences is related to the human capacity of metacommunication, to the capability to question rules and to discuss interpretations of speech utterances, not only of other people but also by comparing one's intentions with the effect they have on the listener. The problem solving capacity of people often depends on self-contemplation, especially in intercultural communication, and when it concerns mimetic practices, rivalry and scapegoating these competencies are indispensable. This is more a human challenge than an intellectual one, one on which rides the human possibility of being rigorously reasonable together. Applying this to the mimetic crisis in the holy land: is there any opportunity that the fighting parties will ever be able to metacommunication and realize that the interpretation of a speech utterance as an attack, insult or threat depends on a context, constructed by themselves?

In *speech act theory* a distinction is made between the locutionary, illocutionary and the perlocutionary level of a speech utterance.

Ppt

Speech act levels

- ILLOCUTIONARY
  intended meaning
  > asserting, suggesting, demanding, promising, vowing
- LOCUTIONARY
  actual utterance and its ostensible meaning (verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects)
- PERLOCUTIONARY
  effect

For practical reasons I changed it a little and use a simple example.

EXAMPLE: "***The window is open***"

LOCUTIONARY **proposition**
lexicon: *noun* window, *verb* to be, *adjective* open
morphology: congruence *window – is*
syntax: word order
reference and predicating

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[2] Sacks (2003): 202.

ILLOCUTIONARY **intention**
- information? *'Yes I see, it's open, interesting, una bella vista',*
- request? *Please, close it*
- order? *Repair it!*
- warning? *Too cold, you get fever!*
> Meaning depends on social relations (parents-children e.g.)
>>> With **indicator**: *I warn you*, Peter, the window is open

PERLOCUTIONARY **effect**
getting the addressee to close the window, to leave the room, etc.

A speaker becomes aware of the illocutionary or perlocutionary force of his utterance by the reactions of the hearer/addressee and add an metacommunicative utterance (or indicator) to explain about the illocutionary level:
* No, I didn't mean to *hurt* you darling, I *express* my personal feeling
* No, really, this is not an *insult*, I am joking
And of course , the other party can explain that on the perlocutionary level, the effect differs:
* Well, to me this is not a joke, because… etc. etc.

When participants in a conversation try to overcome their conflicts, the metastance is a precondition to discussing the real or potential illocutionary force of speech acts. In the best case it can lead to accepting the intended meaning of an utterance and even to agreement on the illocutionary force of an utterances. Through the metastance one establishes a qualifying context. By listening to the reactions of the other party on what has been said, people will realize that there doesn't exist something like the fixed meaning of a speech act, but that it is fluid, and differs from person tot person. In enables participants to discuss the goals of encounters, form and content, to reflect on styles and channel, or to change the discourse of 'you are lying' to a discussion on what on the perlocutionary level is perceived as a myth, while the speaker on the illocutionary level just meant to present his or her narrative, the story told by parents and grandparents - the hidden voices in the speech event.

Ppt
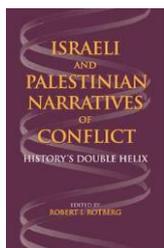
This is what the authors of *Israeli and Palestinians narratives of conflict* tried to do. Along the way the notion of narrative eclipsed the more pejorative examination of myths that had been the initial focus of the discussions. But even then - I quote from the preface : "Much of the disputation of the wider conflict was duplicated, vehemently, within the confines of our meetings, [this volume] hence represents not a consensus but a continuation of an ongoing dialogue between two hotly held and well-expressed sets of views."

In sociolinguistics the construction of meaning in such a process of mutual reflection depends upon many components of the *communicative events*. In the seventies Dell Hymes described these in a scheme, mnemonically S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G, which I consider still very useful.

[Ppt]

- **S**ituation, Place, Time
  - setting [place & time], scene [cultural]
- **P**articipants
  - more than speaker- hearer
- **E**nds
  - purposes: goals & outcomes
- **A**ct Sequence
  - message Form and Content
- **K**ey
  - language varieties, tone, manner, non-verbal aspects
- **I**nstrumentalities
  - styles & channel
- **N**orms
  - for interaction and interpretation
- **G**enre
  - myth, narrative, poem, riddle, proverb, prayer, oration, lecture

Some examples. Concerning **participants**. One of the Dutch Girardians told me, how during the Oslo peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians the character of the communicative event changed by introducing the children of the negotiating parties during one of the meetings. It caused a change in behaviour, in perception – and the meaning of many utterances changed. A leader of study seminars on Cyprus, between Jewish and Palestinians in their twenties, stresses how important (**situation**, **place** and **time**) it is to plan side activities. During a seminar on 'Fear and Trust' participants were together in a swimming pool and a Jewish man taught a West Bank Palestinian how to swim – later the Palestinian told the group: 'Well, only now I realize that we 'll never succeed in driving the Jews into the sea, they are good swimmers and will come back!' The shift to another genre (joking) enabled the participants to broaden their metacommunication skills. Last April, in Haifa, Jafar Farah, director of *Mossawa Center. The Advocay Center for Arab Citizens in Israel* started his talk on delegitimization of Palestinians in a comparable way: we are not the kind of Palestinians who 'd like to drive the Jews into the Mediterranean. Self-mockery is a speech act that might give room to important shifts, also from Jewish side.

12

A big problem is that Israelis and Arabs have few opportunities to meet each other and tend to perceive the other stereotypically. To young Palestinians in Bethlehem Israelis are mainly "settlers, soldiers and policemen", David Neuhaus explained last year. Born in South Africa, raised in a family of German secular Jews, a Roman Catholic Jesuit now, working for the Hebrew peaking Vicariate in Israel (H.S.V.I.), a part of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, professor at the university of Bethlehem he regularly passes the *checkpoints* and observes how recently immigrated young Russians decide on permits for elderly women who have lived all their lives in the region. He is one of the many people in the region who try to bring people together, although the western media pay little attention to these initiatives. I mention *Rabbis for Human Rights*, who pick olives on the West Bank after incidents. In the Galilee Christian Arab Elias Jabbour from Shefar'am, founder of the House of Hope, propagates *sulha*, a traditional Palestinian peace process to solve conflicts. He was one of the organizers of the Galilee Peace Conference last year – I posted the declaration on the website of this conference. Most impressive to me are the common memorial ceremonies of Independence and Nakba day by Israelis and Palestinians together. These communicative events are very emotional and require an enormous effort from the organizers – says Maja Taji Dagash. But more and more Israelis and Palestinians are interested.

4   MULTIDIRECTED LOYALTY

The mimetic crisis in the holy land is one of the most successful export products of the fighting parties together. In *Things hidden* (98) Girard writes that the more intense mimesis becomes, the more the conflicts it provokes, and their subsequent resolutions become 'contagious'. We can therefore suppose that as mimetic rivalries intensify, they involve an increasing number of participants. This what happens in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Every incident leads to heated discussions outside the region, especially in the western world.

In sociolinguistic terms, speech acts with the illocutionary force of insulting, taunting, affronting, humiliating, offending, attacking, assaulting, exaggerating, blaming, lamenting, lying and impeaching are abundant and demonstrate how the imitation of antagonisms leads to a rapid proliferation of doubles. Like fighting in a pub there is big jumble. In my own country, the Netherlands, by tradition a strong supporter of the state of Israel, many 'converts' changed their minds, but keep devoted to the pattern 'good guys, bad guys'. In their loyalty to the Palestinian case – out of a sense of justice - they are demonizing Israel, sharing in the victimhood of the Palestinians. It is the *mensonge romantique*: we are always on the right side.

But *mutatis mutandis* the same holds true for those who abuse the Holocaust to neglect or justify violations of human rights by the state of Israel. I am impressed by the argument of Israeli author Avraham Burg, formerly a member of the Knesset, whose parents were Holocaust survivors. In his book *The Holocaust Is Over; We Must Rise From its Ashes* he argues that the Jewish nation has been traumatized and has lost the ability to trust itself, its neighbors or the world around it. In his view this is one of the causes for the growing nationalism and violence that are plaguing Israeli society and reverberating through Jewish communities worldwide.

In our globalising world we tend to channel all our rivalries and scandals to one area. Is there an alternative for us to choosing for one of the two parties in this conflict? Mimetic theory teaches us not succumbing to contagion. During my experiences in different study seminars in Israel I learned about the concept of multidirected partiality or multidirected loyalty. Listening to the narratives of both Jews and Palestinians, asking questions, trying to live their situation, without condemning is the best that we outsiders can do. And we need to shift our attention from what the media tell us to the many positive initiatives at local level.

And is there any hope the conflict will even end? David Neuhaus taught us: *every* conflict in world history came to an end, so there is reason to hope. And to frame his remark with a quote from Jonathan Sacks: "Optimism is the belief that things will get better, hope is the faith that, together, we can make things better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It takes no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to have hope."(206)

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2010   *Son of Hamas* (Tyndale).

6 APPENDICES

6.1 Declaration Galilee Peace Conference May 1-2, 2009

Declaration issued by the Galilee Peace Conference, organized by the "House of Hope" in Shefa Amr and "The Center of Meeting and Dialogue" in Nes Ammim, unanamously adopted on May 2, 2009

1. We, the participants of the conference, are convinced that the goal of peace, coexistence and justice can only be reached in mutual recognition of the rights of both the Jewish and Palestinian people, and the minorities in the region. We refuse to become depressed and frustrated in the midst of the fear and suffering caused by the ongoing Israeli – Palestinian conflict.
2. We have discovered the face of the other, and we recognize that every human being is created in the image of God. No one is superior or inferior. We will not give up the vision that all human beings are equal and that our children will live in peace and share the land.
3. We commit ourselves to accept each other as partners, with all our differences. Being different should not be a threat but a mutual enrichment.
4. We acknowledge that the continuation of violence and hatred is caused and being perpetuated by mutual fear. Jews and Palestinians have fostered their own particular narratives and regard the narrative of the other as a threat to their very existence. We commit ourselves to listening and to stop demonizing each other.
5. We believe that peace can only be reached by compromise and mutual understanding, and by healing of the wounds of both peoples.
6. We appreciate the diversity of the people in the country, resembling the beautiful colors of the rainbow. We continue to believe in the vision of living in co-existence with full equality for all ethnic groups. We reject second class citizenship for any group.
7. We resist extremist and fundamentalist religion convictions that block peace efforts and cause violence and death. Religion can be divisive but also a tool for peace and justice. We support the common efforts of religiously motivated Jews, Christians, Moslems, Druze and others, together all people of goodwill, who want to pave the way to a better future.
8. We choose, at this conference in the Galilee, to commit ourselves to dialogue, reconciliation and mutual acceptance. We realize that there is no other way but to live together in peace in the same land.
9. We call for deepening the education for peace in every educational means, programs and opportunities. We reach out to all other groups in Israel and overseas to join hands in this objective.
10. We (means here: Jewish and Arab Israeli's) welcome guests in our country, like those in Nes Ammim, who want to live here for a certain period of time. We encourage them to be active and to commit themselves to building bridges of understanding and dialogue between Palestinians and Jews.
11. We invite all people of good will, such as the people of Nes Ammim and others, to join us in the vision and in the effort to bring about peace and harmony of human relations among all the inhabitants of this land. E-mail address: dialogue@nesammim.com

6.2 Marc Rosenstein: Discovering the other in the Galilee, May 1, 2009

by Rabbi Marc J. Rosenstein (Galilee Foundation for Value Education, Shorashim)

As an adult immigrant from the multicultural, individualistic, theistic democracy of the United States that formed me, as one who left his entire extended family and essentially abandoned his parents to come here, as a Reform Jew, as a utopian Zionist, as a white middle class male, as a PhD and rabbi, as the father of three children who served in the Israeli army, as a member of a small, homogeneous rural community… I discover the Other in the Galilee every day. There are so many here who are Other to me, and whom I have to work to see and to see into, as opposed to just looking past them. Every day here, after twenty years, I am reminded of how little I understand and how much more there is to learn about the experiences and perspectives, about the humanity, of all these Others among whom I live.

As is customary at gatherings like this one, it would be easy to give a short sermon on the importance of this discovery, on the value of looking at and listening to the Other and trying to discover who s/he really is, enabling us to form a human relationship that would transcend the various conflicts that divide us.

However, that seems to me to be the easy way out, kind of a "cop-out". Over the past several years I've had the opportunity to visit South Africa several times, and to be amazed by the process of change that nation has undergone since Apartheid. One of the most interesting aspects was the Truth and Reconciliation commission

process, which I have studied a bit. And in one essay on the process by a Christian clergyman, I read a sentence that has stayed with me now for years:

Reconciliation without restorative justice is merely a salve for the conscience of the privileged.

It is very well to talk about reconciliation on the personal level, about discovering and accepting the Other, about "moving on." However, if the framework in which this is supposed to take place is fraught with injustice – or even perceived injustice – then the process is hypocritical at best.

It seems to me that in our situation here vis a vis Jews and Arabs in the state of Israel, we face a complex framework which does not allow us to consider reconciliation in a vacuum. Specifically, there are at least four dimensions to be considered:

1. The philosophical/political. What does it mean for Israel to declare itself to be a Jewish state and a democracy? It may well be that such a combination is possible – but so far, no one has spelled out just how to do it; indeed, among the Jewish majority there is nothing even approaching consensus on how to define a Jewish state, and what should be its relationship to democracy. Hence, there is a lingering doubt, an uncertainty, a vagueness, about how the political and cultural framework of the state relates to its citizens who are not Jewish. When Zionism attempted to redefine Judaism as a modern nationality instead of a religion, it opened a difficult and complicated discussion that is still unresolved. We can be best of friends as individuals, but if there are questions about political status, about equality of opportunity, about distribution of power, about loyalty to the framework – then there is something false in our friendship.

2. The historical. We have in many cases conflicting versions of our history in this region, and since we are operating in a context of nationalism, national historical narratives are deeply influential on our respective identities and our perception of the Other. I may be able to accept the other, and find common interests and values and humanity, but if deep down inside I am carrying around a collective memory in which I am his/her victim – he stole my land, she killed my grandfather, once again, discovering and accepting the Other can be painful and maybe even, for some of us, impossible; this is perhaps our greatest challenge. Meanwhile, history continues. Israel is in a state of armed conflict with Arab states and organizations outside its borders. Much as we would like to be able to say that reality is unconnected to the relationships between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel, it is connected, and makes our relationship to the Other even more complicated and often difficult and painful.

3. The cultural. We live in largely separate communities, attend separate schools, speak different languages, have different cultural norms regarding clan, family, individualism, authority, gender relations, etc. It is often possible to see life in an Arab village in the Galilee as still breaking out of pre-modern modes, while mainstream Israeli society is what some would define as already post-modern. This divide often poses great obstacles to integration, to building a common life, to creating equality of opportunity. There are serious questions of what is possible and at what price. The Jews and other groups in the US jettisoned large sections of their identity and culture as the price of integration. Europe and the Middle East have been trying for a century to create a system of national minorities with a degree of formal cultural autonomy. Europe has not exactly been a success story, and as we speak there is concern about new violence against the Roma there… Can there be cultural autonomy without a political price? Can there be integration without a cultural price?

4. The personal. Maybe this is the easiest, if only we could disassociate it from the previous three: it seems to be a universal phenomenon that people distrust, fear, even hate those who are different from them. We experience here old fashioned simple racism, prejudice, mutual ignorance, fears founded on demagogy, all the ills we find in all societies everywhere, compounded, of course by the uneven distribution of power between a dominant majority and a minority. Here, the role of education, of dialogue, of social integration, of shared interests in the workplace and in public concerns like the environment – can have impact, helping break down prejudices and fears and creating partnership. However, is it realistic to expect to make progress in the personal area when lurking in the background are the weighty factors mentioned above, of defining the nature of our ideal society here, of defusing the historical memories and current fears that won't leave us alone?

The question is, of course, where do we begin? Can we begin to solve the bigger issues – the political/philosophical, the historical – by starting with the human and the cultural? Or is it foolish to play around with human and cultural issues when the philosophical and historical conflicts cast a pall, rendering our efforts trivial? I have spent the past twenty years struggling with that question, and my work assumes that you can start from the human and the cultural to create a climate for discourse about the more difficult issues. But I don't know if that is right. I really don't know.