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VICTIMS OF VICTIMS?

The Mimetic Crisis in the Holy Land from a Sociolinguistic Perspective

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Approaching the Roman Catholic Church of the Annunciation towering over the city of Nazareth, the visitor passes 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)". This statement in terms of winners and losers instead of 'dignity of difference' (Jonathan Sacks), shows one of the numerous examples of mimetic rivalry in Israel, occurring on many different levels.

In the scenario of MT the discourse of winners and losers has its match in the question 'who is the victim'. After the establishment of the state of Israel, for at least two decades sympathy for the Jewish victims who transformed themselves into winners was predominant. But in the seventies discussions arose about the Palestinians as 'the victims of the victims'. Fighting over truth and myth in this battle of narratives became contagious and is currently being exported to other countries. Rather than getting involved in the question 'who is right and wrong', or into retaliation and revenge, I prefer focusing on strategies of contextualization and understanding in relation to some successful attempts in overcoming mimetic rivalry. As a starting point I take a phrase from the Declaration issued by the Galilee Peace Conference in 2009, "We commit ourselves to listening and to stop demonizing each other."

My paper argues for the use of linguistic skills in avoiding scapegoating and expounds a remedy for rivalry leading to violence. With a model for analyzing the pragmatics of cross-cultural communication I try to clarify some aspects of the semantic field of the terms in use and the dimensions of speech acts in some successful dialogue projects between Jews and Palestinians.

BIO

Michael Elias is a Dutch linguist, who carried out field work on the urban dialect of The Hague. He taught communication studies at Rotterdam University and sociolinguistics at the Faculty of Letters of VU University (Amsterdam). For the past 25 years he has directed *Lexis language agency*. His publications bear upon literacy, applied linguistics and [taboos in contemporary speech](#). His Ph. D was on [Neck-riddles](#) (Utrecht University) in relation to mimetic theory. At the VU Blaise Pascal Institute, he was secretary of the *Studiekring René Girard* (1994-2004), editor of www.girard.nl (2004-09), member of the steering committee for COV&R 2007 and co-organizer of the European Summer School MT (2010). Since last year he has chaired the *Dutch Girard Society* (sponsored by *Imitatio*) and joined the board of [Nes Ammin](#), a Dutch-German Christian village in the Galilee.