National Identity in Israel History Lessons

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between national identity and history lessons in Israel as a means of nation-building. The problems raised are: (1) What is the construction of Israel's national identity? (2) How has national identity discoursed on nation-building projects? The historical method with a nationalistic approach developed by Ernest Renan and Anthony D. Smith is used as a research and analysis framework. Renan explained that nationalism is a combination of the struggles of the ancestors in the past and the desire to unite in the present. On the other hand, Smith formulated nationalism in three main elements: national integration, national autonomy, and national identity. The results of the study show that Israel's national identity rests primarily on Zionism and the Holocaust. Therefore, the subject matter of history primarily discusses the efforts of the Israeli people to return to Palestine as an ideal place to build the nation. On the other hand, the Nazi/Hitler massacre in Germany, known as the Holocaust, was seen as the pinnacle of suffering for the Jewish community in exile.

Keywords: *Israel's National Identity; History Lessons; Nation-Building; Zionism; Holocaust*

Introduction

Israel is one of the countries that has received much attention from the world community. His political behavior, especially their conflict and war against the Palestinian people, has generated criticism and hatred, mainly from various Middle Eastern countries. The negation of the nation of Israel is nothing new. In the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, which is believed to have been revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad, QS al-Ma'idah/5: 64, it is emphasized that "they do mischief on earth and Allah does not like those who make mischief" (Muchsin, 2015). Even in a hadith, it is explained that the Prophet Muhammad ordered to fight and kill the Jews (Amri, 2018). This reality shows that the nation of Israel has long been seen as a problem in Arab society. The question then arises: Can Israel, even though it has been hated by many for centuries, survive until now? Among the complexities of the underlying factors, this study will discuss one of the elements supporting the strength of Israel as a nation capable of developing into a nation-state, namely nationalism.

Nationalism is seen not only as a force to fight colonialism but is also understood as a vital force to develop itself into a superior nation (Gellner, 2006). In the United States emerged the movement of nationalists who tried to defend their country as the leader and center of world civilization. In China and Korea, nationalism has become a vital element for self-resurrection and developing economic superiority today. Like the phenomenon in multi-ethnic states, nationalism in ethnic states is also a force to defend

and develop themselves as a nation. The uniqueness of the ethnic state is the strong bond between the present and the past. Members of an ethnic group feel united by a common heroic ancestor (Oleinik, 2019; Smith, 1999).

Various studies have been carried out to understand the intricacies of nationalism, from aspects of historical genetics, manifestation or expression, to its development and inheritance. Ernest Renan emphasized the will to unite and state as the most crucial element in nationalism (Renan, 1882). Meanwhile, Kohn (1992) describes nationalism as the belief that the highest allegiance of individuals is left to the nation-state.

On the other hand, at a later time, Anderson (1991) suspected that printing technology and especially the breadth of consumers of printed goods became one of the essential elements that gave birth to nationalism. The emphasis of Anderson's attention is, of course, not only on the printed material physically but especially on the content contained therein. Printed commodities are a means of exchanging information and ideas, thus creating a unified view. The results of reflection on cross-discourse through *printed commodities* make the reader, borrowing the perspective of Heidegger (1996), reach the stage of awareness as self *(self)* and as a nation (*nation*). Awareness as a nation is increasingly strengthened by discourses about the existence of a shared destiny, culture, and ideals. The development of nationalism in the next stage gave birth to a nation-state.

The problem of nationalism becomes more interesting to observe when it comes to the inheritance stage. The establishment of a nation-state will be sustainable if it is supported by new generations who have a strong spirit of nationalism. From this point of view, the reproduction of nationalism for inheritance is a must for the nation-state. Usually, the inheritance of nationalism is wrapped with the label of a program or project " *nation-building* " or " *character building.* "

This study is directed to understand the phenomenon of inheritance of nationalism in Israel. This election was based on the consideration that Israel's position as a nation-state always invites controversy, anti sentiment and even encourages the development of acts of violence with neighboring countries. The problems posed are:

1. What is Israel's national identity construction like?

2. How has national identity discoursed on the " *nation-building* " project?

Methodology

This study uses a historical method of source collection, criticism, selection, analysis, interpretation, and ends with writing. Source collection is done by studying documents in journal articles and books discussing Israeli nationalism from various credible sources. The analysis uses a nationalist approach developed by Ernest Renan (1882) and Anthony D. Smith (2010). In Renan's view, nationalism is a spiritual principle consisting of two elements: the ancestors' struggle and the desire to unite (Gerson & Rubin, 2015; Renan, 1882, pp. 57-58). The heroic struggle of the ancestors in the past becomes a collective memory that makes the community proud. In various societies, the heroic struggle of the ancestors has developed into a myth accompanied by traditional rites.

The second element in Renan's formulation is a united desire to establish a nation-state jointly. The desire to unite can be in the form of a desire to continue various similarities in traditions and culture or a common destiny and ideals in the present (Darsono, 2015; Gerson & Rubin, 2015). These ideas encourage the community to make it happen jointly.

In Smith's formulation of nationalism, the desire to unite is one of three main parts: national integration, national autonomy, and national identity (Smith, 2010, p. 9). The will to unite is the initial

process, and national integration is the result. In this context, national integration results from uniting various things into one nation and state (Mulyoto, 2011) so that all parties feel like an integral part of the nation-state (Hodgins et al., 2016). On the other hand, national autonomy can be defined as the right of nations to self-determination (Arzoz, 2020). Meanwhile, national identity is a characteristic of a nation that distinguishes it from other nations (DaCosta, 2018). For the citizens of that nation, national identity is a sense of belonging to the nation and its shared characteristics, including the national flag and anthem, national history, and traditions and culture rooted in the period before becoming a nation (Smith, 1991).

Israel Identity Review

There are at least two elements that are very strongly understood as the identity of the nation of Israel, namely as a chosen nation and a persecuted nation. Identity as a chosen nation is narrated in written stories that have been sacred from generation to generation as the Torah scriptures or known among Christians as the Old Testament. In the Torah section called *Devarim, it is* told that Yahweh appointed the children of Israel as a chosen nation. As in other mythical societies, various rules and teachings are neatly intertwined with beliefs or religions so that their observance is not based on factual truth or moral studies but instead has a religio-magical nuance. In the case of the Israelites, identity as a chosen nation is strongly tied to Judaism. The two are like two sides of a coin: the Israelites are Jews, and Judaism is for the Israelites.

The presence of international "support strengthens the cultural identity of the nation of Israel as a chosen nation." The three major religions, namely Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam, place Israeli culture as the source of their existence. All three acknowledge and even believe that the nation of Israel is the producer of the prophets. Although rooted in Israeli culture, they have left the exclusivity of the Jewish religion. The three grew into missionary religions or da'wah that were ready to use both peaceful and violent means to spread their teachings.

The second element of identity is Israel as a persecuted nation. Israel's persecution has a narrative about the diaspora, the Holocaust, and the savagery of neighboring countries. One of the historical roots of persecution used as the reason for Zionism is the narrative of the Jewish diaspora that spread to various continents. Diaspora occurred since the 8th century BC when there was war between the kingdoms in Israel itself. They set up settlements in present-day Iran. The diaspora continued when the Roman Empire conquered Israel and forced its inhabitants out of Jerusalem. The wave of the Jewish diaspora in this period was mainly to the European region. During the Middle Ages, they belonged to Jewish communities whose livelihoods were mainly as traders and moneylenders. Internationally, the Jewish community is divided into two major groups: Ashkenazi for those living in Europe and Sephardic for those living in Iberia, Africa, and the Middle East. The use of diaspora as the basis of Zionism can be seen, among others, in Bialik's poetry (Reinharz & Shapira, 1996, p. 157).

The narrative of the Holocaust is related to European pressure on the ethnic Jews living in their area. The suppression of ethnic Jews in Europe has long existed in anti-Semitic movements, such as the expulsions from England in 1290, Spain in 1492, and Portugal in 1497. These movements often took the form of mass racial riots against the Jews, who were known in European history as the program. In the modern era, the program initially appeared on the territory of the Russian Empire because the Jews were seen as involved in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 (Aly, 2020; Hay, 1992). European states' pressure on the Jews culminated in the atrocities of *Amalek* (the Nazi name in Hebrew) (Friedländer, 2009). It is said that during World War II, approximately 6 million Jews died in detention camps. They were victims of atrocities by Nazi soldiers who carried out mass killings using poison gas (Rudolf & Mattogno, 2005).

Israel's identity as a persecuted chosen nation makes its nationalism manifest in the form of readiness to face life's challenges and threats, even in the form of physical violence. As a chosen people,

they were religiously confident that Yahweh would protect and protect the nation of Israel. As a persecuted nation, they are ready to fight any threats that come their way.

Nation Building Project

Israeli nationalism initially developed in the Zionist movement (returning to Mount Zion as an icon of Israel) at the end of the nineteenth century. The movement was triggered by the evacuation of Jews from Russia to Palestine. They founded the national movement organizations for the establishment of an independent state of Israel. Mikveh Israel was founded in 1870 by the Israel Universelle Alliance, followed by Petah Tikva (1878), Rishon LeZion (1882), and other agricultural societies founded by members of Bilu and Hovevei Zion. At the First World Zionist Organization (WZO) Congress in 1897, the decision was made to build houses for the Jews in Palestine guaranteed by public law (Aberbach, 2003; Penslar, 2018).

During World War I, big countries, such as Britain, France, and the United States of America, for the WZO idea. In 1917 British troops, with the support of Egypt and the Zionists, succeeded in occupying Jerusalem and ending the four centuries rule of Ottoman Turkey. The problem that then developed was about the future of Palestine. Will Palestine be the home of the Arabs or the Jews? The British kept the issue quiet and gave neither Arabs nor Jews any rights. Three years later, the British planned the future of Palestine, whose contents were known as the Palestine mandate, and became an official decision of the British Empire in 1923. In that mandate, the British Empire recognized the ties of the Jews to Palestine, thus allowing them to make Palestine a place of residence. Opportunities are wide open for Jews from anywhere to migrate to Palestine. The position of Jewish migrants is the same as that of Arab residents (Reich, 2008, p. 21).

The Palestinian mandate sparked a protracted conflict between Arabs and Jews, mainly due to the migration of Jews from Europe and massive land purchases supported by funds from Zionists and various international Jewish organizations. The conflict prompted the British government to ban the migration of Jews to Palestine. During World War II and the Holocaust, thousands of Jews in refugee camps wanted to migrate to Palestine but were not allowed to by the British government. As a result, there was an illegal Jewish refugee route which heated the situation in Palestine. The crisis became uncontrollable when Britain handed over the Palestinian issue to the United Nations, which later passed Resolution 181 on the division of Palestine into two, namely Arab and Jewish settlements. A civil war between Jews and Arabs ensued and culminated in creating the state of Israel on May 14, 1948.

Establishing the nation-state of Israel is a critical journey for the Jewish community in Palestine. The problem is how to pass this nationalism on to new generations to defend their nation and state. As in other nations, Israel instills and develops nationalism in the younger generation through various means. One way is through education. Borrowing a subtle criticism submitted by Apple (1993), the importance of nation-building projects makes the state determine what materials are suitable for students. From this point of view, education in general, and education for nation-building projects in particular, are tools that function to produce agents and victims. Students become objects to be manipulated, so they are committed to destroying, isolating, and marginalizing external parties seen as threats to their existence (Gur-Ze'ev, 2001; Compare to Khoury, 2020). Therefore, nation-building projects are often propagated as a means of "rescuing" from attempts at destruction by other (external) parties.

In the case of Israel, this hegemonic educational logic is dramatically manifested in indoctrinating learning. History lessons are used to instill values, perspectives, and characters that can ensure the sustainability of Israel as a nation-state (Podeh, 2002). It was emphasized to the students that Israel was the promised territory of God after the Jews had suffered long-suffering in exile. From this point of view, the nationalism to be instilled in students is territory-based nationalism (Chowers, 2018).

Apart from being indoctrinating, inculcating the cultural identity of the Israeli people is also done by isolating students' historical knowledge in the context of Zionism. From elementary school to high school, students only learn the history of the "return" of the Jews in the Ottoman era, known as the Zionist movement, until the proclamation of independence in 1948. Through this history lesson, students are expected to experience the suffering and persecution of their predecessors in Europe and their tenacity in fighting for the establishment of an independent state of Israel. The main topic explored is the Holocaust because it is seen as a historical event with the tremendous potential to instill an Israeli identity. In 1953 Yad Vashem was founded, a center for Holocaust study, documentation, education, and warning (Gross, 2010). The institute tries to record various factual aspects of the Holocaust. To visualize historical facts, in the next stage, the Holocaust museum was built. The visualization carried out by the museum is mainly on aspects of the horror of the suffering and struggle of the Jews who survived the Holocaust, intending to be able to give an emotional effect to visitors, especially students as the younger generation (Boord, 2016).

The focus of learning the history of the Holocaust began to change in 2014. According to Kaminka (2016), Holocaust learning was developed by discussing with students:

1. Questions regarding the lives of the Jewish victims before and during the Holocaust.

2. Questions regarding the bystanders and the "Righteous among the Nations."

3. Questions regarding the Perpetrators.

From the three problems developed, it appears that history learning is directed at making the Holocaust a human tragedy (Gilbert, 2014). Thus, students will understand that the Holocaust is a problem for the Jews and a problem for the world community.

One of the problems faced by the study of history is the exclusivity of the material, which is only studying the history of Israel. History teaching materials do not include contemporary dynamics that occurred in the surrounding areas and the post-independence state of Israel. As a result, an understanding of neighboring countries is not obtained, so, naturally, Israeli students do not know that Britain has controlled the Suez Canal (Haramati, 2009). Even though it has positive aspects, indoctrinating and isolating Israeli cultural identity will make students feel dissatisfied and have a vague understanding of contemporary developments about their country.

Isolation is not limited only to teaching materials but also to the whole school system. The Israeli education system divides public schools into four groups: Jewish-secular, Jewish-religious, Ultra-Orthodox Jews, and Arab-Israeli (Agbaria, 2018). These demarcations are structural and imply different levels of access to material resources but, most notably between them, lead to different narratives of cultural and national identities that contradict one another. These groupings also affect differences in curriculum, teaching quality, and graduate outcomes. Asbah (2009) criticized that segregation and differentiation in the Israeli education system created public and civic spaces that were disconnected from each other and fostered stereotypical perceptions that fostered prejudice against students from other schools. A segregated and fragmented education system will form a segregative, fragmented, and alienated society (Agbaria, 2018).

Apart from education, the government also maintains Israel's cultural identity by maintaining exclusivism. In 2002 the Israeli government began to build walls of separation between Muslims, Catholics, and Jews (Thawaba, 2011). Culturally, the 450-mile-long fort has become an icon for maintaining the purity of each identity. The fort serves as a barrier to social interaction between ethnic groups and politically as a means to demonstrate claims to territory. The construction of the fort of Jerusalem is a form of Israel's claim that Jerusalem is one and indivisible, without considering the views of the Palestinian government and the international community (Hanauer, 2011).

Even if it has long historical roots and functions effectively to maintain security, the government's move to erect Israel's walls is not without criticism. Psychologically, the wall's existence does cause not only a feeling of being confined or limited but also a feeling of being separated or separated from each other on the other side (Farinacci, 2017). Criticisms about learning materials and physical segregation have emerged since the early twentieth century but have not received serious attention from the government (Podeh, 2002, p. 27). Apart from the moral aspect of the government's decision to build a wall that separates settlements, another issue that is no less important is the result of that decision. The wall became a symbol of the end of the sense of brotherhood between fellow human beings and was replaced with suspicion and fear. People become suspicious and afraid of other people, including friends. Even that fear has become a syndrome. They are not only haunted by a fear of war but also fear of peace.

Conclusion

Learning from the research on the inheritance of Israeli nationalism can be understood that the print media related to language and communication has an essential role in initiating and developing ideas or ideas of nationalism. Print media as *hardware* and language with their meaning as *software is* very functional in growing collective awareness to build cultural and national identity.

Print media and language create unified exchange and communication platforms. With print media and language, they become more understanding of what other people say. Through these two instruments, fellow connected readers then form the embryo of a community that is imagined nationally.

Print media and language have an essential role as a vehicle that disseminates subjective ideas about the nation. Printed books give certainty to language so that, in the long run, it helps to build the image that is so important to the subjective idea. A printed book will retain its original shape permanently and be reproduced forever in any time and temporal dimension. Printed books can be the language of power. Through printed books, there is a dynamic transaction process that fosters an awareness of the creation of the community aspired to.

In the case of Israel, the inheritance of nationalism is not only through optimal use of printing technology but is also supported by the development of the education system, especially the history education curriculum. Without intending to turn a blind eye to various opposing sides, exploring the discourse of national identity in the subjects of history conducted by Israel will be an exciting alternative to be considered in the development of Indonesian society, which is in a crisis of national identity.

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