

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict from the Perspective of National Identity

Yitao Wang

Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing, China

wangyitao5934@126.com

Abstract

As one of the main problems in the Middle East, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has always been an urgent problem to be solved. From the perspective of national identity, the causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are more profound. The national identity construction of Palestine and Israel has a long history, and both are influenced by traumatic memory, historical narration and land identity. However, there are some differences between the two countries on the basis of common ground. In addition, these common ground also led to the intensification of the conflict between the two countries, casting a shadow on the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Keywords

National Identity; Palestinian-Israeli Conflict; Trauma; Memory; Historical Narration; Land Identity.

1. Introduction

National identity originated from the enlightenment movement in the 18th century and initially involved the construction of a nation-state. Nationalism famous theorist Anthony Smith proposed national is defined as: the population of a named sum, its members share a historic piece of territory, share a common myth, Shared history and common public culture, all members lives in an economy, to share a set of applicable to all members of the general legal rights and obligations. [1] It can be seen that the concept of nationality is multi-dimensional, and its collective rules are influenced by religion, class and other factors. Among the concepts of nationality, ethnic identity emphasizes the cultural orientation of a nation (group). Huntington believes that cultural identity is defined by "ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs and institutions"(Samuel Huntington,2013.12). In nation-states, cultural identity is closely linked with national identity. Therefore, to explore the national identity of Palestine and Israel, it is necessary to trace the ancestors, religious and historical reasons of the two countries first.

2. Palestinian National Identity

Palestine, as a part of the Arab nation, existed for a long time and did not directly establish its own national identity in the early stage. It was not until its emergence as a nation-state that this identity was gradually established. Palestine broke away from Arab nationalism after the fall of Saud al-Faisal in 1920, but did not officially become a state until 1988.

The Zionist movement played a crucial role in the formation of Palestinian national identity. Traumatic memories have been formed in the history of Palestine, which has been invaded and occupied many times by foreign peoples. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Palestine was a fragmented state, with successive regimes. With the Entry of Jews into Palestinian areas, Jews gradually occupied Palestinian land, water, oil resources,

palestinians began to feel a crisis. Even the palestinians, divided among themselves, have formed a common consensus against Zionism.

After the first Middle East war in 1948, Palestine faced an even worse crisis. The war left the Jewish minority with 55% of the land, 960,000 Palestinians as refugees, intensified the Arab-Jewish conflict and laid the foundation for the hostility between Arabs and Jews to this day. The Israeli occupation of Palestine has damaged the process of Palestinian national identity. Palestinians in Israel became Israelis, while palestinians in exile were often referred to as "Arab refugees". Palestinian national identity has also been curbed by the destruction of land and ethnic relations. And Israel's judaization policies after the occupation, such as renaming place names or seizing and destroying archives, have erased the original Palestinian national memory. These events have also made the existing Palestinian population hostile to Israel.

Palestine has been campaigning as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) for 24 years since it declared independence in 1964. After the June 5 War in 1967, the National liberation movement of Palestine reached a new peak. The Palestine Liberation Organization is a central force. The PLO was born in the struggle against Israel. In 1958, Arafat established the Palestine National Liberation Movement (Fatah for short) in Kuwait, which began to fight against Israel and strive for Palestinian national independence. The establishment and movement of Fatah greatly encouraged the Palestinian people, and the Camara campaign led by Arafat made Fatah regarded as the hero and hope of the "revival" of the Palestinian world. And the PLO's well-equipped stonewalling of Israel has left its struggle with an unyielding spirit and a shared national memory that forms part of the modern Palestinian national identity.

In 1988, Palestine issued its Declaration of independence. Since independence, Palestine has observed many festivals to remember its painful history, including Martyrs' Day (January 7), Homeland Day (March 30) and Nakba Day (May 15). But with the birth and rise of Hamas, Palestinian national identity is also facing a new crisis. Unlike the PLO's national identity, which promoted secularism, Hamas worked to promote an Islamic identity. The conflict between Fatah and Hamas has undoubtedly caused a split in Palestine, and this conflict has also led to the current political instability in Palestine. In the construction of national identity, Palestine is still facing internal troubles and external troubles.

3. Israel's National Identity

It is different from the process of Palestine first forming a state and then starting the construction of national identity. Israel constructed its national identity first and then its state. The state of Israel was officially proclaimed on May 14, 1948, in accordance with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181. Israel is the world's only country with a Jewish majority, making up 73 percent of the population. (Data sources: baidu encyclopedia <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E4%BB%A5%E8%89%B2%E5%88%97/215548>) Beginning with the "Prisoners of Babylon" in 586 BC, ancient Israel perished in war and turmoil; The Jews who fled to Europe suffered persecution for a long time under the situation of anti-Semitism in various countries. After the rise of the Zionist movement in the 19th century, a unified consensus emerged among Jews scattered across the globe. As Herzl, the father of Zionism, said: "We are a people -- a people, and Being Jewish is neither a social problem nor a religious problem... It is a national issue." (Theodor Herzl, 1993.12) [3] Unlike traditional definitions, the concept of the Jewish nation as a nation was controversial for a long time. Because the Jews do not have their own country, there is no common blood ties. But the Jewish nation's long-standing adherence to common beliefs and traditions has led scholars to believe that Jews can be considered as a nation.

At first, Jewish national identity was mainly based on religious identity, that is, the religious influence of Judaism. This influence was particularly prominent in the early Zionist movement.

The idea of messianic salvation inherited by Orthodox Judaism also became the ideological force of Jews longing to return to their homeland. Zionism is one of the core values of Judaism. The "return to Zion," the "return to Jerusalem," became an important part of Jewish culture. The Israeli-Palestinian dispute over Jerusalem continues today. After the trauma of World War II, of course, the remaining Jews wanted a "Jewish state" to ensure their common survival, and the "return to Zion" came back into their lives. Europeans, on the other hand, have long assumed that traditional states are made up of a single people, a rule that has, of course, been overturned over and over in political history. But the idea of Israel as a nation-state still enjoys the support of most Westerners, the most direct external support for Israel. Because of the particularity of the Jewish nation, Jews scattered all over the world still share the same national identity. Israeli policy also allows them to renounce Israeli citizenship while retaining their right to return to Israel. It also allowed these Jews to play to their strengths as expatriates, and thus to gain more for Israel. Take the three major American media (CBS, NYT, CNN) as an example, the top executives are almost all Jewish. (Data sources: <https://m.weibo.cn/5721376081/4640123813628028>).

After the establishment of the State of Israel, the majority of Jews in The country still adhere to the Zionist ideology. Now this ideology has new development in modern times, such as post-Zionist criticism of traditional Zionism, but the mainstream in The country is still the traditional hardliners. They insisted on their control of The Palestinian Arabs and on their domestic priority as Jews. As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has intensified rather than healed over time, anti-Arab and greater Israeli sentiment has grown.

4. Comparison of National Identity under the Conflict

4.1. Shared Traumatic Memories

One of the main factors in the formation of Palestinian and Israeli national identities is the formation of traumatic memories.

Traumatic memories of Palestine come from foreign invasion and Zionism. Among them, the memory of suffering under Zionism is one of the reasons why modern Palestinians find it difficult to dispel their resentment against Israel. After the First Middle East War, when Jews occupied the former Palestinian territories, a large number of Palestinians began to exile. This painful memory was transformed into national emotions, thus promoting Palestinian national identity. Israeli policies such as the renaming of Palestinian territories and the destruction or occupation of state archives have dealt a major blow to Palestinian national culture. In order to protect their own culture, Palestinian intellectuals also want to wake up the national consciousness through traumatic memories and prevent the disappearance of national history and culture.

Israel came from long exile and a history of genocide and discrimination. Traumatic memory is an indispensable part of Jewish historiography. Therefore, after Theodor Herz proposed the idea of a Jewish state, Jews all over the world longed for the realization of this dream. After the inhumane extermination of the second world war, the survivors' collective traumatic memories also generated a strong sense of existential crisis and the need to establish a Jewish state. The recognition of the image of the victim also makes it easier for the Jewish nation to unite and form a national consensus. After the establishment of the State of Israel, this sense of crisis turned into nationalism in the face of The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which strengthened the national identity of Jews and of course bred dissatisfaction with non-Jews. The reinforcement of Israel's image of the victims can be seen in primary school education: "Watching the evidence of Hitler's massacre of Jews at the World War II memorial hall, reflecting on the suffering due to the absence of a country; In front of the Wailing Wall in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the tragic fate of the entire Jewish people for thousands of years." [12]

Affected by traumatic memories, both countries see themselves as victims, thus intensifying feelings of revenge against each other. Under such hostility, the national identity of the two countries has been further developed, and so on and so on, the hatred and misunderstanding between the two countries have also been further increased, which has become the difficult cultural characteristics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Traumatic memories contributed to the growth of nationalist sentiment in both countries and further ethnic conflict.

4.2. Similarities and Differences in Historical Accounts

Another cultural cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict I think is a dispute over historical narratives. National history is the common memory of a nation, and the narration of national history is also the best way to inherit national memory. One of the main policies of the Israeli Government after the occupation of Palestinian lands has been to destroy or destroy Palestinian history and archives. For the Palestinians, the disappearance of these precious historical facts is a devastating blow to the history of the Palestinian nation. Since then, many Palestinian scholars have proposed oral history as a way to restore history. Oral history strengthens refugees' political and cultural identity and maintains Palestinian national identity. However, oral history also has the characteristics of subjectivity and emotionality. On the one hand, it strengthens the "exile" characteristics of refugees; on the other hand, the history narrated from the perspective of refugees focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is quite controversial.

The traditional mainstream historians of the Jewish nation mostly take the official historical archives as the data, which has the characteristics of systematicness and integrity. After the First Middle East War, Israelis relied on the IDF archives to establish the current mainstream narrative of the first War. Arab accounts of the war, by contrast, are far from adequate and are dominated by oral history. This is also the long-term historical narrative of the two countries. In addition, the mainstream Israeli historiography "Jerusalem school" emphasizes the construction of "Palestinian central historical view". This construction advocates a reinterpretation of Jewish history in the context of the Palestinian homeland. [6] The typical method is to rename Palestinian areas after Biblical places. The reinforcement of traumatic memories such as the Holocaust by the "Jerusalem School" reinforces the identity of the nation as a collective victim, "and what is more, all Israelis are potential victims of the past, present and future." [13]

On the other hand, historical narrative is actually related to international discourse power. The dominance of Israel's narrative of the Middle East wars and its support in the West have made it easier for the international community to sympathise with Israel. Yet Palestine has had great difficulty in confronting the historical narrative of deconstructed Zionism and has long been excluded. Comparatively speaking, the historical narration of the two countries is difficult to be truly rational and objective, and both are affected by national emotions, so there are big problems in subjectivity. From the perspective of historical narration, only by correctly interpreting the history of Palestine and Israel can we avoid falling into rashomon, better understand the respective positions of the two countries and deal with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict impartially.

4.3. Land Identity is an Important Part of National Identity

The dispute over Jerusalem has long remained unresolved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both share a desire for a "return" to Jerusalem, which epitomises the two countries' link between land and national identity. Territory is an important part of a country. How to describe the relationship between land and country is an important part of building national identity.

After the founding of the state of Israel, the memory of Palestine's original territory desalinates and even negates the diaspora, and regards the diaspora era as the intermediate period

between ancient glory and modern revival. At the same time, the presence of Arabs was ignored and erased. At the same time, they renamed the land after biblical places to reinforce Israel's sense of belonging. The long-desired State of Israel was finally established, and the Jews had a permanent territory of their own, not a nation to which they belonged. Such thinking undoubtedly makes Israelis more appreciative of their territory, and Israelis are wary of Palestinian attempts to reclaim it. Israelis also strengthen national education about national defense: let children look at military facilities on the border, understand the country's living environment and dangers, Israelis form a strong sense of homeland security from an early age.[12]

Palestinians have a lot of land in their national identity. After losing the land, they reinforce the description of land memory in the narrative. These places that no longer exist promote Palestinian refugees' sense of belonging and national feeling, and the idea of reclaiming land is as much in the minds of Jews as it was in the past. This national memory has been passed down from generation to generation by mapping the villages that once existed, and by having refugees tell their histories, so that Palestinian refugees do not lose their identity.

The contents of land identity in both countries have strengthened their own national identity, of course, which also leads to a huge contradiction in the cognition of the ownership of the same land. At present, such contradiction is still difficult to reconcile.

5. Conclusion

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has always been a major problem troubling the peace situation in the Middle East and has not been properly solved for a long time. From the perspective of national identity, many contradictions in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can be said to be rooted in the cultural core of the two countries. In an era of resurgent nationalism, Israeli-Palestinian relations seem ever more irreconcilable. In the latest firefight, the tension between Israelis and Palestinians has grown even more intense. The Israeli-Palestinian issue has also been overshadowed by western intervention.

In order to properly solve the Palestine-Israel issue, apart from the simple territorial dispute, it is also important to understand the deep connotation of the two nations. As a bystander, the international community should give more objective and equal understanding and attention to the Palestine-Israel issue, rather than allowing Palestine and Israel to become the "arena" of world power, and should not impose its own values on other nations. We should promote negotiations and peace between Israel and the Palestinians instead of escalating tensions. Only by letting go of hatred can the Crescent be restored to its ancient past and the Middle East usher in a lasting peace rather than a temporary ceasefire.

References

- [1] Anthony D. Smith, Translated by Wang Juan, *Ethnic Identity*, Yilin Publishing House, 2018.3.
- [2] Samuel Huntington, Translated by Zhou Qi, *The Clash of Civilizations*, Xinhua Press, 2013.1.
- [3] Theodore Herzl, Translated by Xiao Xian, *Jewish State*, Commercial Press, 1993.12.
- [4] Deng Yanping, *Oral History, Collective Memory and National Identity in Palestine, West Asia and Africa*, 2021.3.
- [5] Liu Peng, *Research on Israeli National Identity*, Northwest Normal University.
- [6] Ai Rengui, "Jerusalem School" and the Construction of Jewish Nationalism Historiography, *World History*. 2020.6.
- [7] Li Zhifen, *Research on The Construction of The Israeli Nation: A Discussion of Ideology, Ethnic Group and Religious Factors*, Northwest University.

- [8] Zhong Zhiqing, Bible and the Construction of modern Israeli Nation-State, West Asia and Africa, 2014. 3.
- [9] Yao Huina, Historical memory, Historical writing and Ethnic Identity: A Case study of Palestinian Nationalism Historiography, Historical Theory Research, 2020.3.
- [10] Xie Licheng, Arab-Israeli Conflict from the Perspective of Identity, Middle East Studies, 2016.2.
- [11] Lu Siya, The Development history of the Palestine Liberation Organization, International Information, 2002.2.
- [12] Lu Wei, Zhao Hu, Distinctive Israeli Defense Education, China Defense News, 2020.7.
- [13] Omer Bartov, Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation, Oxford University Press, 1996, p.178.