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Zionism and Identity Crisis: Ethnic Conflict between Israelis and Palestinians

Headings

Abstract   The Palestine issue is attributed to be the most complicated problem in the region of the Middle East. However, few researchers analyze the problem through the lens of ethnic conflict. This research paper investigates that the use of Zionism as a metaphor for colonialism and its role in fostering an ethnic conflict between Israeli and Palestinians. Qualitative content analysis is used to analyze secondary data on ethnic conflict in present Israel. In addition to that bargaining model of war is used to identify the underlying issues of the ethnic conflict. The findings reveal that Zionism and identity contribute to accelerating the ethnic conflict between Israeli and Palestinians. Despite international interventions and signing many peace agreements, the problem remains unresolved due to a trust deficit between both ethnicities.

Key Words: Ethnic Conflict, Zionism, Colonialism, Identity, Ethno-Nationalism, Secession

Introduction

Casting a glance at history is important in order to comprehend the Palestine-Israeli conflict. Encompassing manifold clashes, it is difficult to classify the nature of such convoluted conflict. On one side, the conflict seems to be a humanitarian struggle that requires the immediate provision of human rights and self-autonomy. Being a sovereign state, Israel should have all the rights ascribed by international law. Contrarily, on the other side, the conflict seems to be of political nature where the postcolonial political order does not exist uprightly (Said, 2018). In fact, categorizing it as political, its boundaries are further blurred with religion. Tracing back to the incident of 9/11, it divulges the influence of religion on politics.

In addition to that, the ideology of nationalism is a cardinal concept of the modern nation-state, which has added fuel to the fire, particularly in the context of the Palestine-Israeli conflict. Nationalism is not just confined to national interests but instead fosters the idea of belonging, identity, mobilization, ethnonationalism and hence legitimizes the use of deadly force and violence. Moreover, disputes over cultural differences, territorial distribution and unequal resources are the other important factor (Mitchell S. C., 2017). Palestine issue is attributed as the most contentious debate in the Middle East. Although many political strategies have been opted ranging from negotiation to inter4nation al intervention, no fruitful results have been yielded (Bao, 2018). In the light of the aforementioned analysis, the Palestine-Israeli conflict is an ideal research study of an ethnic conflict.

Significance of the Research

This research intends to focus on multiple dimensions of the Israeli- Palestinian ethnic conflict. The basic themes

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include; Zionism as a metaphor of colonialism, the link between national identity and ethnic conflict and major factors contributing to ethnic discrimination. The research will be beneficial for studying the role of religious ideologies in politics. Moreover, the following research would also assist researchers from Comparative religious studies, History, Political Science, International relations, Sociology, Governance and social policy and other interrelated Social sciences.

Problem Statement

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is attributed to the most complicated conflict in the region of the Middle East. The nature of complexity revolves around the fact that the ethnic conflict encompasses multiple factors; political, religious, territorial, cultural, language, resources, secession and identity. The issue has resulted in the destruction of infrastructure, homelessness, Dysfunctionality of the education system, political instability, refugees' issue, loss of human life and social chaos. The Palestine struggle is based on the following key concerns; Demand of Ethnonatio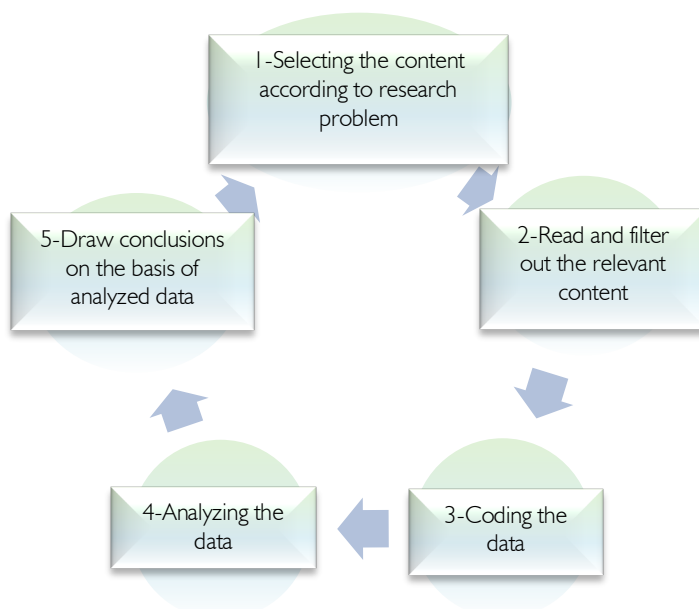nalism, Issue of Land sharing, illegitimate settlements in present Israel, Ambiguity about the religious status of Jerusalem, Issue of temple Mount and accommodating refugees in different countries of the world. Despite the international intervention, the military presence of foreign troops, involvement of the United Nations and signed many agreements and treaties, the issue has not been resolved even to this day. In addition to that, a large number of stakeholders worsen the situation. Initiating with the movement of Zionism coupled with the hidden agenda of colonialism, the demands for a separate state based on the argument of distinct identities and ethnic discrimination escalated the conflict. Therefore, it is necessarily important to analyze the ethnic conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Qualitative Content Analysis is selected as a research methodology to conduct the following research. More specifically, secondary data will be used for content analysis.

Following sources will be used for data collection;

- Books
- Journal articles
- Organizational reports
- Information based on an authentic News report

Steps for Conducting Content Analysis

Justification of Selecting Content Analysis as a Research Methodology

Other qualitative research methodologies like focus group discussions and direct interviews will not represent the viewpoint of all ethnic groups. Moreover, the language barrier could also lead to misinterpreted conclusions; therefore, qualitative content analysis of already conducted researches and collected data will be the most reliable method to understand the multifaceted ethnic conflict between Israeli and Palestinians. Furthermore, this methodology is least likely to affect the researcher's personal biases.

Contextualizing the Israel-Palestine Ethnic Conflict

The Palestine struggle is based on the following main concerns: Ethnonationalism, Land sharing, Illegitimate settlements, Religious status of Jerusalem, Issue of temple Mount and Accommodating refugees. Therefore, the conflict is multifaceted, and each issue requires a unique strategy to deal with it (Lewin, 2016). Moreover, regardless of the type of prevailing political system and ethnic associations, the responsibility of the state is to protect the rights of its citizens (Rouhana & Ghanem, 1998).

The emergence of Israel in 1948 was the key moment to accelerate ethno-nationalistic demands, and voice of separate states began to echo. It seemed to be some extended form of colonization as a large number of Palestinians were coerced to leave their homeland and migrate to the Middle East as well different other countries all across the worldwide. Whereas a handful of Palestinians that were left in Israel became a minority ethnic group. Today, there are four main Palestinian groups which can be categorized as follows:

i. Citizens while being in Israel
ii. Victims of Israeli military occupation in West Bank and Gaza Strip
iii. Palestinian refugees in adjoining Arab countries
iv. Palestinian refugees in other countries

The abovementioned categorization divulges that despite being one ethnic group, Palestinians are geographically distributed and are subjected to different socio-political environments (Andrews, Makhoul, & Reynolds, 2012). According to a recent survey, there are approximately five million Palestinian refugees who make up a large number of populations all around the world (Mason, 2019).

Which Major Actors are Involved in Israeli-Palestinian Ethnic Conflict?

Although the research paper is confined to the study of Israel and Palestine as the two major ethnic groups yet to have a better understanding, it is important to cast a glance at the key stakeholders who are involved and are directly or indirectly influencing the conflict.

Primary Actors

Indeed, the key actors in the conflict are Israel and Palestine, whereas Palestine is further divided into Hamas and Fatah (Popa, 2017).

Secondary Actors

The USA, Iran, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia are categorized as secondary actors. These are the actors who have interests in the escalation of tension between the competing parties, or perhaps they have a stake in case a conflict resolution process takes place. Israel has always maintained close ties with the United States of America. The United States has always stood on Israel's side and provided strategic, economic and political backing (Zunes, 2002). Israel also served as an important partner of the United States against the Soviet Union during the cold war. In contemporary times, Israel ranks at the top in receiving the highest foreign aid from the United States of America.

Contrary to that, Iran does not recognize Israel to be a legitimate state. Iran is a strong supporter of anti-Israeli Arab sections. Both Iran and Israel endeavour to maintain their hegemony as a non-Arab state (Alattrash, 2016). There also exists a nuclear security threat between Iran and Israel. Iran also provides economic assistance to Hamas and Syria, and other anti-Israel lobbies. As far as Saudi Arabs are concerned, the Iranian-Saudi rivalry makes Saudi Arabs maintain a working relationship with Israel despite the harsh fact that Saudi Arabs does not recognize the legitimate existence of

Israel. Saudi Arabia has a twofold stake in the following context; on the one hand, Saudi Arabia has Palestine as another Arab nation in the region, while on the other hand, due to the presence of Israel, Saudi Arabia has a major strategic partner against Iran.

Tertiary Actors

The tertiary parties do not have any direct stake, yet they are capable of deriving indirect benefits from such conflicts. Contextualizing the scenario of ethnic conflict between Israel and Palestine, the following tertiary actors can be identified; Turkey, Syria, Lebanon and United Nations. Lebanon holds an anti-Israel stance along with the presence of Hezbollah. Despite the ongoing civil war, Syria supports Iran against Israel due to the personal stake of Golan Heights that was lost by Syria in 1967. In the past years, Turkey had more inclination towards Palestine due to similar ideology and geopolitics. But for the last few years, Turkey has maintained friendly ties with Israel; however, the stability of friendly terms has always experienced ups and downs (Inbar, 2011).

Although the strategic partnership has been continued, poor confidence-building measures often ended in failure. However, United States can play a crucial role under its leadership to develop a triangular cooperative bond (Arbell, 2014). United Nations has already numerous actors to deal with and therefore is often blamed for having played a biased role in resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Although United Nations has supported Palestine yet, it has failed to directly condemn the discriminatory policies and oppression of Israel against the civilian population of Palestine. Still, United Nations was constrained to pass few resolutions against Israel due to violation of the human rights of the Palestinian native population according to the definition of international law (Popa, 2017).

Role of Global Policeman

The Jewish lobby of Israel has a vital role in shaping the position of Israel's position in the ongoing conflict of the Middle East. The government of Israel is fiercely dependant on the Jewish lobby in Washington and, more particularly, on the United States. Under the presidency of Donald Trump, the pro-Israel stance has persistently been nurtured, but there is not any certainty regarding how long it would persist. Analyzing the present situation shows that Israel is backed by the United States. The United States has also increased military assistance to Israel by increasing the yearly security assistance from 2019 to 2028(Averbukh, 2018).

Social Constructivism and Interpretation of Ethnic Conflict in Palestine

Social Constructivism scrupulously attempts to explain cross-ethnic conflicts. It elucidates the disparities faced by a minority in a pluralistic society. The social Constructivist approach has already been used by international actors to resolve the Palestine issue as constructivism encompasses; symbolism and the way ethnic conflict is socially constructed (Javadikouchaksaraei, Bustami, Farouk, & Ramazaiandarzi, 2015).

Identifying Impending Author Bias

In order to avoid sympathized feelings towards Muslim Palestinians and predetermined general notions about the Israeli oppression, the research is based on secondary data. Moreover, the data is not merely composed of indigenous Israeli and Palestinian journals rather, different international journals have been selected for content analysis to preclude author's personal prejudice.

Recolonization in the Name of Zionism

The Israeli critical paradigm of Sociology has integrated the ideology of Zionism with colonialism (Pappe, 2008). Zionism is attributed as a distinct type of recolonization as it is the only unique historical example in which the natives returned back for the sake of patrimony, revitalization of language, cultural propagations and reconstruct their society. Both hold valid claims over identity, self-autonomy and territory. Likewise Palestinian Arabs, Jews assert the argument of authentic indigeneity which creates a jigsaw puzzle within a jigsaw puzzle. Regardless of being metaphor of recolonization the Jewish demands seem to be rational (Ukashi, 2018).

The founding fathers of Zionism emphasized on separate Jewish secular identity based on nationalism, flourish Rabbinical Hebrew language, encouraged immigration of Jews to Palestine, political and economic control. Zionism encouraged the use of violence wherever it was necessarily required. The movement faced severe criticism, particular the immigration of newcomers to Palestine. Furthermore, renunciation of Jewish identity fostered tensions between the ethnic groups. Indeed, Zionism fostered discrimination and re-established the classical relation between the colonizers and colonized. Therefore, the Arab and Jewish religious differences served as a catalyst to escalate the ethnic conflict. In the following case study, religion is the key factor to nurture the issue of ethnonationalism, too (Jong, 2018).

Zionists encouraged the formation of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. The Six-Day war of 1967 further boosted the morale of Jews, finding it relevant to the promises made by the Torah; Jews have eventually owned them. A large number of native Palestinians were expelled from their homeland without any hope to return back ever. On the other hand, Muslims attribute the land of Palestine as waqf that can neither be sold nor subjected to any trading as till the day of judgement it belongs to Muslims (Mitchell S. C., 2017).

The Zionist movement had great importance in changing the history of Palestine. The movement used a religious foundation to establish a separate state (Halperin, 2015) as far as religious motivation towards the use of violence is also justified through the notion of Jihad in order to get back the holy land that has religious sacredness. Many Quranic verses encourage the Muslims to go for Jihad; therefore, such religious interpretations legitimize the use of violence. In addition to that, the notion of religious nationalism fosters unity against the enemy who intends to control the land of Muslims. So, religious-nationalist ideology has a significant contribution to have an inclination towards ethnonationalism demands in the shape of a rising voice for establishing an independent state of Palestine. Zionists made use of historical, religious, political, social and cultural discourses to rationalize their arguments to acquire a separate independent state

through control over Palestinian territory. According to Zionists, the land of Israel was bestowed to Jews by divine god; therefore, neither there can exist a sovereign Palestinian state nor has any discrimination been done against the Palestinians who left Palestine as Palestine was never supposed to belong to them. Hence, religious nationalism, in fact, often nurtures terrorism in the context of Israeli Jews (Mitchell S. C., 2017).

Palestinian Conflict over Identity and Material

Social identity influences the behaviour and actions of individuals; therefore, it has a central role in fostering ethnic conflicts between different groups (Elbedour, Bastien, & Center, 1997).

In the case of ethnic conflict in Palestine, the concept of "self and other" shapes the loyalty with the group cooperatively (Chaitin, Awwad, & Andriani, 2009). Any group of individuals that share similar interests, ways of living create separate identities and intend to unite despite geographical distances, eventually create a distinct national identity. On the basis of national identity, the group develops the concept of in-group. Analyzing the case of the Israel- Palestine conflict divulges that threat to collective identity worsens the ethnic conflict. Putting this in a political context, researchers elucidate that historically both competing parties have been claiming their rights over territory as well as natural resources on the basis of national identity. National identity within itself is the aspired objective and provides a rationale for possession of territory and control over resources. Palestinians and Israelis have identity threats from each other; therefore, each ethnic group endeavour to foster unity, develop distinctive cultural values, and promote religion and language to present a positive image and strengthen the in-group cohesion (Kelman & Fisher, 2001).

The Discourse of Identity Crisis in Palestine

A research study conducted in 2013 reveals the significance of media in establishing different discourses for Israeli and Palestinian youth. Israeli dramas tend to shape the desired opinion towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the one hand, the

theatre provides an ample opportunity to Palestinian teenagers to address the issues regarding minority identity in Palestine that triggers the emotional discourse for Palestinian students, but contrary to that, Israeli educational officials don't want those minority demands to be addressed, nor do they attribute any educational value of such plays and hold a narrative that such violent plays must not be allowed for Israeli youth (Gesser-Edelsburg, 2013).

How does Palestinian Identity Conflict Shape Material Conflict?

The ethnonationalist demands accompanied by religious and territorial conflicts make the Palestine issue more complicated. The solution to the issue has to be analyzed in terms of ethnic conflict resolution (Heraclides, 1989). Besides national identity as Palestinians, the religious identity of Palestinians as Muslims also matters to escalate the ethnic conflict (Mi'ari, 2009). Conflicts over identity occur when the specific identity of one group poses a serious threat to the identity and existence of the other, leading to insecurity. The one side denies recognizing the self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy and provision of rights of the other. Therefore, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is purely based on identity as, from the very beginning, both ethnicities are reluctant to recognize each other's nationality.

The conflict persistently prolonged with the ethnonationalist demands for a separate state to maintain their distinct identities, but it was also not tolerable in present Israel. The Palestinians are supported by the Arab world; therefore, for more than a century, they are not ready to recognize the rights of Jews in Israel. Moreover, neither the Palestinians are ready to recognize Jewish nationalistic identity as legitimate, nor do they favour the establishment of a separate state by Jews. Material conflicts often result as a by-product of some kind of larger conflicts, with ethnic, identity, ideological or other interrelated dimensions, making the conflict much more complicated to resolve (Auerbach, 2009).

Ethnicity and Cultural Discourse

The Jewish society has undergone frequent tremendous changes in Israel. Unlike before, it is no more a collectivist society; rather, it has been transformed into an individualistic society, and Jewish culture promotes materialistic values similar to the process of Americanization. Contrasting to Jews, Arab ethnic groups living in Israel have collectivist cultural values; conservative ideology, emphasis on traditional rigidity, perusing concept of welfare model, homogenous society, decentralization and less individual freedom. Once, the Arab society used to be dependant on agriculture, but then they created their demand in the Jewish labour market and hence economic mode gradually changed. Modernization also influenced the Palestinian Arabs as the institution of the economy began to shape the rest of the institutions, likewise the super-structure model of Karl Marx (Sharabi, 2010).

Ethnic Discrimination in Israel

Ethnic conflicts have a higher tendency to use violence, especially strong ethnic identities that can foster more violence (Naumkin & Voronkova, 2014). Not merely the Arab world, but the attention of the international community has also been drawn towards the oppression and discrimination faced by the local Palestinians of Israel. Israeli occupation is also condemnable according to the international law and United Nations charter of human rights (Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, 2014). Political discrimination on the basis of ethnicity has become a routine for the Palestinians living in Israel (Niwa et al., 2016). In response to the military occupation, Palestinian uprisings also began, fuelled by the idea of ethnonationalism and in order to defend their legitimate rights. Besides discriminatory policies, Palestinians are subjected to intensive violence, illegitimate use of force and deprivation of basic human rights, fostering security concerns for civilians in the Israeli occupied territory.

A large number of Palestinian civilians were killed by the Israeli military forces, and many were either imprisoned in Israel or deported from the occupied territory. Thousands of people were made homeless. Furthermore, illegitimate Israeli

settlements persistently increased, including many public level constructions and hence issue of homelessness became one of the major concerns for the Palestinian civilians. The functionality of education institutions completely halted when schools, colleges and universities had to be closed for a prolonged time, and informal teaching was strictly banned. Curfew was placed in villages and other areas. In addition to that, trading, utility, well-being and other major departments were curtailed. The role of media and civic organizations were also banned. Environmental degradation also had drastic implications on agriculture (Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, 2014)**.**
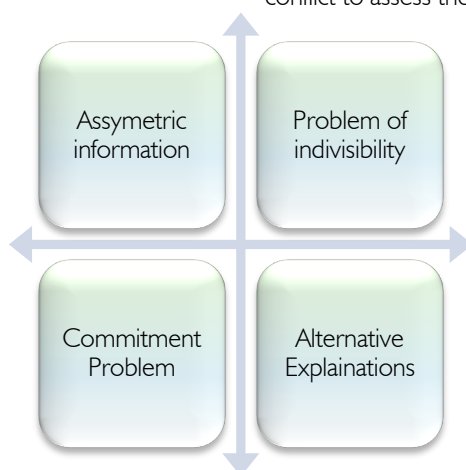
Limitations of this Research

Although the Israeli- Palestinian conflict can also be categorized as a political or religious conflict the present study encompasses multiple dimensions and view it specifically from the lens of purely ethnic conflict. The research proposes few possible options to resolve the conflict in the last section of this research paper, but it is not the core focus of this study.

Data Analysis

Applying Bargaining Model of War

Contextualizing the Bargaining model of war is the most relevant in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to assess the major issue.

Asymmetric Information

Analyzing the discourse of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict divulges that asymmetric information is not the causal factor as both parties have sufficient information about the strengths and weaknesses, military might, domestic politics, technical capabilities, historical linkages and forces of intelligence. The rapid illegitimate settlement, occupation and military strength of Israeli military forces is scrupulous in determining the position of each side and probability of war. Hence, instead of lack of information, both ethnic groups have extraordinary information about each other.

Problem of Indivisibility

According to many scholars of International Relations, there is particular nature of conflicts where division is nearly impossible. For example, conflicts such as; ethnic, ideological, identity crisis and territorial distribution. Considering only territorial dispute in the context of Palestinian conflict encompasses multiple issues within itself. Determining the status of Jerusalem and illegitimate Israeli settlements. In addition to that role of religion in politics makes the situation much more intractable as both sides can neither return nor divide the territory. Still, divisibility cannot utterly be considered obsolete. Yet, there is an option to internationalize the old city of Jerusalem. Since possession of Jerusalem is not the only dispute, therefore this option cannot be attributed as a major obstacle.

Commitment Problem

The commitment problem seems to be most dominant in the case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both sides have trust deficit regarding the agreements, implementation and compromises. Absence of any neutral third party to guarantee the effectiveness of agreements worsen the issue and lack any additional compromises in future.

The commitment issue originates from two main sources:

a. Probability of misinterpretation
b. Trust deficit in the implementation phase

Both parties have trust deficit accompanied by many historical evidences that provide ample rationale to foster mistrust.

Alternative Explanations

There can be several alternative explanations in the context of the following conflict. For example, cost-benefit analysis of maintaining the Israeli status quo divulges that there is very low cost, but on the other hand, continuing the accelerated illegitimate settlements also have low benefits for Israel. In the light of the aforementioned critically analytical considerations, the commitments problem can be attributed as a major obstacle to conflict resolution in Palestine (Frieden, 2015).

Major Findings

On the basis of secondary data analysis, it can be concluded that Zionism shares the characteristics of colonialism; demand for a separate state, separate identity, promoting Jewish language, controlling land and resources, imprisoning Palestinians and likewise many more traits. Secondly, identity promotes the in-group vs out-group antagonistic sentiments leading to develop the concept of "Self and Other". Moreover, separate identity emphasizes an independent sovereign state and hostility towards the other ethnic group; therefore, there is a positive correlation between identity and intensity of the ethnic conflict. Many ethnic factors are responsible for discrimination against Palestinians, including; cultural differences, language, religious ideologies, identity crisis and ethnonationalism.

Discussion & Conclusion

In future, the following possible steps are recommended:

- Minimizing the Israeli occupation
- Getting bigger autonomous territory
- Internationalizing the Status of Jerusalem
- Indigenous sociocultural context should be considered besides international intervention
- Opinion of local masses over one-state or two-state solution
- Criteria to ensure the transparency and unbiased role of UN
- Providing access to the outsides world for Palestinians
- Eradicating economic discrimination
- Precluding illegitimate settlements

Recommendations for Future Research

Future researches must focus on how ethnic conflict resolution strategies can be applied to the Palestinian ethnic conflict. The present study has identified the ethnic factors which contribute to discrimination. Further researches can categorize the most and least dominating ethnic factors through quantitative research methods. Likewise, Zionism role in other religious movements can also be analyzed in promoting colonialism.

Conclusion

This research article has attempted to elucidate the ethnic conflict between the Israeli and Palestinians. The research endeavoured to investigate the similarities between Zionism and colonialism and why the Jewish Zionist movement is used as a metaphor for colonialism. Secondary data analysis divulges that identity has a positive correlation in escalating ethnic conflicts. Moreover, cultural differences, language, religious ideologies, identity crisis, and ethnonationalism fosters discrimination against Palestinian minorities. Applying the Bargaining model of war shows that issue of commitment is the foremost factor of failure due to misinterpretation and trust deficit. Despite international interventions and signing many peace agreements, the problem remains unresolved due to the commitment issue. The article also proposes

few possible options to appease the tensions that do not guarantee 100% success yet seems to be the most promising selection from a menu full of quite bad options. However, the true political will of great powers and indigenous leaders ensures a long-lasting solution.

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