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The Zionist Role in the West Bank Conflict

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Abstract:

The goal of this case study is to analyze the role of Zionism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over territory and resources. The author will discuss the plans of Zionists and explain the reasons why Zionists in Israel and America have tried to cooperate to prevent further threats in the Middle East and to maximize their national interests. The author will analyze the Social Identity Theory, and Realistic Group Conflict Theory to explain inter-group conflicts and the competition over limited resources. Different ethnic groups want to gain sovereignty and self-determination, which explains peoples' feelings of prejudice and discrimination toward different interest groups (Beinin & Stein, 2006). Additionally, the author applied the Theory of Cultural Hegemony to investigate why nations pursue cultural hegemony, and why cultures, knowledge, and norms can be influenced by the ruling class that manipulates the beliefs and worldview of in-group people. Therefore, different interests and arguments of groups transformed into physical violence, which caused the settlement conflict in the West Bank.

Keywords: *Social identity theory, realistic group conflict theory, theory of cultural hegemony, Arab-Israeli conflict, self-determination*

1. Introduction

There is a population of around 2.8 million Palestinians and 391,000 Israeli settlers concentrated in the West Bank (Hayah, 2005). The conflicting parties in the Arab-Israeli conflict include the Zionist groups from Israel and the United States, as well as the Palestinian settlers in the West Bank. The Israeli Zionist military actions in the occupied West Bank have interrupted thousands of Palestinian settlers' lives (Booth & Taha, 2017). Many Palestinian communities have been divided, and their neighbors have been completely cut off from the rest of Jerusalem by the wall, which was built by Israelis. Also, Israeli Zionists set restrictions for the Palestinians, which have split Palestinians' families, lives, and decreased the economy of the West Bank. For Arabs, Israel's establishment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank went against Arab rights (Gans, 2008). However, Zionist Israelis believe that this was the opportunity for them to return to their homeland and to reestablish their reputation (Sofer & Dorothea, 1998).

1.1. Definition of Zionism

Zionism was one of several Jewish nationalist ideologies, and it is a bourgeois reaction against ethnic oppression. Zionism is an international political movement that it was originally supported the establishment of a homeland for the Jewish people in the Middle East (Sofer & Dorothea, 1998). For the sake of this paper, "Zionist" is interchangeable with the word "Israelis." Herzl advocated Zionism, and it aims to exploit the riches of the country and to establish a ruling class. Initially, the Zionist group aspired to pursue Jewish interests by replacing Arab wage laborers with Jewish workers (Sofer & Dorothea, 1998). Also, Jewish people were willing to restore their culture and to fulfill their right to self-determination by living in a place that was surrounded by the Arabs (Gans, 2008).

1.2. What is the Conflict?

Since 1967, Israel's policy toward the West Bank has been guided by several major settlement plans. The Israeli plan has called for the annexation of more than one-third of the West Bank along the Jordan River and the Dead Sea (Hayah, 2005). Israeli settlements were constructed along the north-south axis of the Jordan Valley, on the eastern side of the West Bank (Beinin & Stein, 2006). Many Israeli soldiers have the central ideology of strengthening Zionism. They have tried to establish their settlement in the West Bank according to their beliefs. However, the Zionist military's brutal actions against Palestinians have destroyed many Palestinian settler properties and caused hatred and unforgotten trauma between Jewish and Arab individuals. In response, Arab settlers in the West Bank have used stone-throwing or tire-burnings as forms of violence. The violence has resulted in human suffering and political chaos (Liebes, 1997).

2. Social Identity

2.1. Definition of Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory focuses on analyzing the relationship between self-concept and group behaviors (Hogg & Terry, 2001). Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory explains that a person's concept of self-comes from the groups to

which the person belongs (Turner & Tajfel, 1986). Social Identity Theory concerns the categorization of inter-group behaviors. It identifies three components of social identity, which include self-conceptualization, group self-esteem, and commitment of the group (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Also, this theory explains that different groups have different motivations (Turner & Tajfel, 1986). People are willing to fight over interests and might not accept coexistence with other groups because different groups marginalize each other (Turner & Tajfel, 1986). Group identity leads a person to feel connected to their in-group, distinguishing themselves from another group (Turner, 1982). This theory identifies the condition that would lead members of one group to discriminate against or in favor of another group. Additionally, this theory would help in explaining the identities of the Zionists and Palestinians in the West Bank, and by analyzing the reasons why the Zionist group is proudful by achieving regional hegemony (Gorni, 1987).

2.2. Self-Determination

Restoring honor and self-esteem of Jewish people is an objective of Zionism. People in different groups like to seek their historical roots and have the desire to locate the origins in an attempt to determine who they are (Gans, 2008). People often categorize themselves into different boxes and doubt others if they are true believers or not. Zionism has become a dominant concept for many Jewish people. The Zionist group claimed that the goal of establishing a Jewish settlement was to spread Jewish beliefs and to secure protection for Jewish settlers (Sofer & Dorothea, 1998). They believe that they are the chosen citizens of their God. This ideology has excluded Israelis from Arabs and turned Israelis from a minority group into a self-confident group.

The Zionist military believes that they are in the position of power, and they have used their authority to show to Palestinians that they have more power to control the settlement (Hayah, 2005), and to make Palestinians obey specific rules and regulations, which caused abuse and resentment between different groups. The needs for Zionists include democratizing and establishing equal citizenship by forming an internationally recognized border (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). However, Zionists' goals were contradicting the interests of Palestinians and made crises and instability in the region (Beinin & Stein, 2006). The identity of being a settler and living in the West Bank has received a rejection from Palestinians. Different groups can marginalize another group, which could lead to discrimination. Prejudiced views between cultures may also result in racism.

Muslims in the West Bank have a strong sense of belonging to the Muslim community because their primary language is Arabic. From the Palestinians' point of view, Israeli settlers are foreigners. Palestinians believe that this land belongs to them, and they identify their communities as Palestinian because they share the same language and social identity. Also, they see Israelis as immigrants, and they believe that Jewish people come from another place, and do not recognize their right to be citizens of the West Bank. Palestinians want to expel Israelis because they have not only different cultures and beliefs, but also share different social identities.

Many Palestinian women and children have reportedly been hurt physically and suffered mental pain because of brutal military actions towards them. Palestinians believe that Zionist military forces have oppressed them for many years and they do not trust Israelis (Sofer & Dorothea, 1998). They believe that Arabs and Muslims have the right to settle on the land, and Israelis do not (Gorni, 1987). Many Palestinian civilians fear further violent oppression from dominant Zionist political and military occupation in their land.

Zionists in the U.S. and Israel have tried to benefit from engaging in the conflict (Noam, 2007). The U.S. Zionists have supported the regime in Israel and led Israeli Zionists to join military forces to enhance the security in the West Bank settlement (Gans, 2008). Their idea of rebuilding their settlement had the impact on the U.S., causing them to interrupt the Middle East policy. It allowed Israel to gain authority over the settlement in the West Bank (Noam, 2007).

Social Identity Theory explains the reasons why groups discriminate against each other and in favor of the in-group. However, this theory does not discuss if different groups can get the benefit and share outcomes together, so that groups might not fight against each other (Gartner & Insko, 2000). If Zionists and Palestinians are willing to share the same resources and benefits with one another, they might not care about another group's identity (Gans, 2008).

3. Realistic Group Conflict

3.1. Definition of Realistic Group Conflict Theory

Realistic Conflict Theory explains why people have prejudice and discriminate against each other when they do not belong to the same group (Jackson, 1993). It indicates that conflicts arise when people try to defend their conflicting goals and compete for sovereignty and limited resources, such as land, water, food, or Shelter (Selby, 2003). When two or more groups are competing over limited resources, prejudicial feelings can develop against each other (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Realistic Conflict theorist Muzafer Sherif indicates that aggressive attitudes toward an out-group could increase competition between different groups. One group might only allow itself to benefit from the competition. Humans have social exchanges, and they might fight for hegemony or resources (Beinin & Stein, 2006). Zionism represents those who believe in using strong-armed military forces and using power as a tool to protect their security, which contradicts the Palestinians' interests (Gorni, 1987). The current Zionist government in Israel wants to build a democratic state to protect Israeli interests (Gans, 2008). When groups want to gain natural resources and political power in the same land, it will cause armed conflict.

3.2. *Boundaries and Resources*

Both Social Identity Theory and Realistic Conflict Theory can be applied to analyze the impact of the nature of humans' motivations, as well as inter-group competition and interaction. Realistic Conflict Theory essentially assumes that the dominant group preserves their positions by enhancing social hierarchies, which cause group-based inequalities (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The Realistic Conflict Theory states that the discrimination between different groups increases resentment (Jackson, 1993). The strategic location of the Middle East favors one group more than another.

Prejudices can create competition and conflict between different groups competing for scarce resources (Gorni, 1987). Israeli Zionists demand recognition of Jewish sovereignty on the land and suggest that Palestinians only have limited authority on settlements in the West Bank (Hayah, 2005). The Palestinian group feels resentment and hostility. They believe that the ethnic Zionist group poses a threat to them by controlling the usage of natural resources in the West Bank, and human rights of Palestinians are violated on a regular basis by the occupying Israeli power because of military force used against the Palestinians.

Moreover, the principal goal of the U.S. and Zionists in the Middle East was for the protection of its free access and control of natural resources (Noam, 2007). The US-Israeli Zionists relations have increased the development of political leadership and geopolitical positions in the Middle East (Noam, 2007). U.S. foreign policy was responsible for the increasing deference to Israeli policy, whose purpose was to ensure that Israel cooperates with the U.S., and in return, they could get benefits by controlling natural resources. For example, people fight for scarce natural resources, such as water usage (Selby, 2003). Zionist ideas have impacted the U.S. and Israeli policymakers in designing strategies to allocate and manage resources. Israel provides more water supplies and gives local Israeli settlers more time and access to get water, and limits the Palestinian settlers' access (Selby, 2003).

A high-status group with more military power in the West Bank, such as Israelis, might engage in social creativity through conducting discriminatory. Behaviors and use military violence to strengthen their group's superiority (Haslam, 2004). Realistic Group Conflict Theory emphasizes that competitions over limited resources have escalated the ethnic conflicts and humanitarian crisis in the West Bank (Boyd, n.d.). Security and regulations were enforced by Israeli Zionists to limit the ability of Palestinians to leave or re-enter Palestinian territory. For example, water issues have played an essential role in the Israeli national security agenda (Selby, 2003). People must compete for survival as well as ensuring the living conditions for the next generation (Boyd, n.d.). Israeli forces have limited the right of Palestinians to use resources, such as water and electricity (Harvey, 2003). Palestinians believe that they could not fulfill their basic needs for living and that their rights have been violated.

4. Cultural Hegemony

4.1. *Definition of Theory of Cultural Hegemony*

Cultural hegemony has the meaning of the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class, which manipulates the culture in the society, such as the beliefs, values, and norms (Hoare & Sperber, 2016). Hegemony in politics has engaged indirect imperial dominance. Antonio Gramsci proposed that capitalism survives by carrying out war for positions. The ruling class maintained its control not only by violence but also by the effective diffusion of peoples' ideology (Adamson, 1980). Zionists plan to become an imperial regional power to control culture and politics in the West Bank (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). They have used propaganda and military influence to work against Muslim settlers (Halperin, 1960). In sum, the Theory of Cultural Hegemony emphasizes how the ruling class can impact social structures.

4.2. *Ethnic Conflicts*

People pursue hegemony by using religious rules to take direct military force and occupation (Adamson, 1980). Zionists' ruling class wants to manipulate the culture of the society (Beinin & Stein, 2006). Knowledge is one of their strategies to reach their political goals to gain benefit for their own group (Marmura, 2008). They manage the beliefs and norms of people and let them believe that what they did is correct (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). People communicate and interact through social media, which makes information delivery fast and smooth. However, media also has a negative impact, which has caused an influx of propaganda and slander. Therefore, people are more likely to use violent behaviors against others (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Theory of Cultural Hegemony indicates that unjust social phenomena between high-power and low-power groups caused dissatisfaction (Marmura, 2008). As a minority, Jewish groups have spread their ideas to the public that they have been vulnerable to religious persecution throughout history (Gans, 2008). They were struggling over the years as victims of national oppression during the Holocaust. The Theory of Cultural Hegemony indicates that in order to maintain the concept of who has the power and right to dominate the land, people must show that they prevail over regional interest (Hoare & Sperber, 2016).

Zionists interpret the right of their dominant ethnic, cultural group to self-determination as a right to engage in hegemony (Gans, 2008). The high-power Zionist groups want to enhance their self-recognition. Zionists in the Israeli government also used their power to spread their ideology of democracy and freedom throughout the government and the military (Halperin, 1960), so that the government could use this ideology to enhance their authority, as well as to make the military obey the government (Liebes, 1997). Another propaganda tool which has been used by Zionists was implanting and transferring terminology into the way they want others to believe (Halperin, 1960). For example, through the media, they have used specific terms, such as "refugee camp" instead of "Palestinian towns," "plastic-coated steel bullets" instead of "rubber bullets," and "occupied territories" instead of "Palestinian land" to convince the public to believe their

legitimacy of returning to their land. By increasing Zionist hegemony, Jewish people have controlled their affairs and enhanced their sense of dignity (Gans, 2008).

Palestinians also spread propaganda through social media to tell people they were suffering from Israeli invasion, and their rights had been damaged because of Zionists' military activities in the Palestinian settlement (Ariel, 2018). They insisted that they had been living in their land for hundreds of years. In their opinion, Palestinians in the West Bank were concerned that they had the right to occupy their land fully and did not allow any other group to gain their land or damage their interests. No one else had the right to invade their land or rob them of their property (Flint, 2005).

4.3. Strategies of Press and Social Media

Political forces in Israel and the U.S. have manipulated the settlement issue. The Zionist groups in Israel work with the U.S. and try to maximize their relative power to ensure security in achieving regional hegemony (Harvey, 2003). The Zionist groups and the U.S. government have planned to form a "common sense" to flourish democracy ideologies (Shapiro, 1971).

The Zionist ruling class has used media to achieve their political goals. To ideology, the thoughts of Israeli newspapers and journalists impacted the U.S. and encouraged them to achieve the political goal of increasing cultural hegemony (Halperin, 1960). The United States' foreign policies advocate imposing power to ensure Middle Eastern regional peace by pursuing common interests (Beinin & Stein, 2006). American Zionist Jews recognize their Jewish identity and agree that Jewish people have the right to pursue their regional hegemony (Shapiro, 1971). They managed the Israeli media and propaganda and dominated the American mind.

However, Palestinians view this case as the beginning of the occupation of the West Bank. Palestinians have worked out a strategy to win against Zionism and U.S. imperialism. Palestinians' media has sent negative messages about Israeli military occupation and how the U.S. engaged in this conflict (Flint, 2005). The Palestinian media said the occupation and violence had caused economic deprivation, and they believe that Zionists have stolen their land and violated the human rights of Palestinians in which prevented Palestinians from fulfilling their basic needs for identity, recognition, and security (Marmura, 2008).

5. Conclusion

All the three theories explain the causes of the conflict in the West Bank and the Zionist strategies to maximize their national interests. Social Identity Theory illustrates the intergroup conflict by understanding different group identities. Realistic Group Conflict Theory explains how intergroup prejudice can arise as a result of conflicting goals and competition over limited resources. Additionally, the author has chosen Theory of Cultural Hegemony to explain the principal reasons of how knowledge and politics can be influenced by the groups in manipulating people's beliefs and worldviews. By analyzing different causes of this conflict, the author emphasizes that people should respect others' cultures and history, distinguish truth from different perspectives, and protect the human rights of their neighbors.

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