

Research Article

Identity and Sense of Belonging of Indonesian Jewish Communities

Mohamad Rezky Utama

Department of International Relations, Universitas Islam Indonesia – Indonesia

Corresponding Email: mohammad.rezky.utama@uii.ac.id

Submission: 30 August 2022 | Accepted: 05 December 2022

Abstract

Indonesian Jewish communities rarely appear in academic or scientific research. Some existing articles are about Jewish community in other countries or other minorities in Indonesia. This article is aimed to answer the question: “How is the identity and the sense of belonging of Indonesian Jewish Community, to Indonesia or to Israel? In this research, qualitative method is used to examine the issue. The approaches for this research are the concept of identity by Patricia Goff and Kevin Dunn and the Asabiyyah concept by Ibn Khaldun. The finding of this research is the fact that Indonesian Jewish community have a strong relationship and sense of belonging to Indonesia and identify themselves more as an Indonesian. Indonesian Jewish community had contributed to Indonesia’s nation building in the past during the participation of war of independence. And furthermore, with more understanding on the community, the community can take part in building the Indonesian nation in the future.

Keywords: *Indonesia, Israel, Jews, Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Entering the 21st century, the study of international relations is increasingly dynamic, and questions are beginning to arise about concepts or understandings that previously existed in the field of International Relations. Various concepts become irrelevant in the development of an interconnected world. And some of them are the concept of Nation-State and Nationality.

The study of international relations used to be very centered on states and the various affairs that covered them. Entering the post-Cold War period, studies of international relations are increasingly expanding into the transnational realm, without closing the possibility with a re-examination of the concept of the Nation-State and Nationality. According to Juan J. Linz, Alfred Stepan, and Yogendra Yadav, this phenomenon arises because of the difference in the concept of an ideal nationality between a homogeneous country and a heterogeneous country (Sepan, et al., 2011).

The concept of the Nation-State and the Nationality are two concepts that are then debated and must be re-examined in the field of International Relations where national boundaries become more blurred, as well as identity. One of them is the existence of a Jewish community in Indonesia who has an identity as a Jew but also an Indonesian.

Furthermore, Indonesia and Israel adopted different national concepts as mentioned by Juan J. Linz, Alfred Stepan, and Yogendra Yadav.

The question of identity is a contemporary question that only emerged after the Cold War. As stated in the writings of Linz, Stepan, and Yadav entitled "Nation State" or "State Nation": Conceptual Reflection and some Spanish, Belgian, and Italian data, the contradiction between the traditional concept of the nation-state and the concept of the nation – a country that places more emphasis on national multiculturalism within a country. They contrast these two concepts as Linz and Stepan put it:

"We... believe some conceptual, political, and nominative should be given the possibility of state-nations. The states we would like to call state-nations are multicultural and even multinational components, which nonetheless still manage to engender a strong identifications and loyalty from their citizens, an identification, and loyalty that proponents of homogenous nation states perceive that only nation states can engender" (Sepan, et al., 2011).

And some examples of countries in the quote are India, Singapore, and Indonesia. Continuing from the question in the concept of the nation-state above, there are several studies concerned with identity and nationality. Some of them are writings by Shlomo ben Ari on the challenges of ethnicity in modern nationhood, Uri Davis on Jewish ethnicity in the context of Israel, Daniel Tsadik on Identity among Jews in Iran, and Mely G. Tan on Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia. Some of these articles describe similar identity challenges for ethnic groups in various countries.

Shlomo Ben-Ari in the preamble of *Ethnic Challenges to the Modern Nation State*, expresses the polemic of the modern nation-state. According to him, modern nationalism leads to 'collective egoism' (Ben-Ami, 2000). He also pointed out that in fact the concept of nationalism was not known in the time of ancient civilizations or the Christian world of the Middle Ages. And the new nationality emerged after the crisis of modernity in the 18th century through Etatism at the end of his writing, Ben-Ari argues that the era of globalization is an era of ambiguity which is in line with Jüngen Habermas's statement that globalization is the 'post-national identity era' He then cited the phenomenon of the European Union in this argument as a good example while Israel and Palestine as a bad example. According to him: "Israel must redefine its cultural identity. If it is aimed at making solid peace with its neighbors based on cooperation, Israel must become more oriental and abandon the illusion of being America or Europe small" (Ben-Ami, 2000). Continuing the discussion on Jewish nationality, Henry Ford (1920) in his *International Jew: And the Protocols of the Elders of the Zion*, the biggest question in his writings is "Are the Jews a Nation?". In his writings, he summarized the ideas of Moses Hess, Louis D. Branders, and Rabbi Morris Joseph. From the three ideas, Ford wrote that the Jew or Israel is a nation. This will then be a contradiction in the next writings.

Jewish identity underlies the state of Israel as written by Uri Davis in his writings "Being Jewish in the context of Israel. According to him being a Jew can be based on two definitions: "anyone who cares to lay claim to the epithet" as a secular definition; and "any person born of a Jewish mother or a righteous convert to Judaism (Davis, 1994). Later, Davis also relates it to citizenship by saying that "Jewish communities throughout the

world are united by shared affiliations and are separated by secular national citizenship" (Davis, 1994). He described that Israel uses its Jewish identity to determine who can acquire Israeli citizenship.

Furthermore, Daniel Tsadik in his article "Identity among the Jews in Iran", explains the identity of the Jewish community in Iran. By using the concept of identity as the distinguishing character or personality of an individual, individuality, Judaism becomes the main distinguishing factor in Iran (Tsadik, 2012). Nevertheless, Jewish culture in Iran is heavily influenced by Persian culture which is superior in this region (Tsadik, 2012)

Besides some previous research about Jews and nationality, the article by Mely G. Tan is titled "the Ethnic Chinese in Indonesia: Issues of Identity" to discuss about Chinese minorities in Indonesia – a related topic about non-native ethnic groups. According to Tan, the concept of national identity in Indonesia follows the opinion of Ernest Renan and Otto Rauer that the requirement for a nation is the desire to unite, *le desir d'etre ensemble* (Mely, 1997). However, Tan's writings are more focused on ethnic Chinese identity in Suharto's government when ethnic Chinese faced discrimination. In his writings, Tan also supports the prohibitions on Chinese culture.

From the various literatures above, identity becomes an interesting discussion even from the way of identifying identity as a separate concept. And several studies have more or less discussed the identity of minorities in a country and their status with the country of origin. Several studies have also addressed Jewish identity. However, it all comes back to the debate between Nations and Nation-States. This research will then question the concept of the nation state and the nation state. Then, this study will also discuss what has not been discussed in existing studies, the identity of Indonesian Jews. In the question of Jewish identity, it will also provide answers to the sense of nationality and identity between the two countries, Indonesia and Israel. Moreover, this article would like to analyze the impact of Indonesian nation building in the past to the Jewish community in the contemporary era.

METHOD AND THEORY

Two literatures on identity and *asabiyyah* will be used to understand the existence of Jews in Indonesia. There is the concept of identity, and the theory of *asabiyyah* by Ibn Khaldun. The use of Western theory is common in the study of international relations. However, the use of classical theories from Middle-East may be new to contemporary IR scholars. The concept of identity in the study of International Relations is not a new concept. Although there is a correlation between identity and nation, it is not limited to that. Patricia Goff and Kevin Dunn quote from Benedict Anderson that identity will continue to change in the history of human civilization.

In order to understand the immutable and concretely defined concept of identity – if so, that would be a stereotype against identity – Patricia Goff and Kevin Dunn (2004) describe four conceptual frameworks of identity, (1) alterity - the relationship between one person and another is ambiguous and volatile with the possibility of switching from one

identity to another. On the other hand, self-transformation into another identity can result in subordination (Goff and Dunn, 2004, 5); (2) fluidity - The change in identity is related to the surrounding material events and states. Such events can trigger identity changes and vice versa. The development of the direction of change seems to be in line with the decisions of change agents whose identities and practices set an example and determine "this, and not that" (Goff and Dunn, 2004, 6); (3) constructedness - various actors of change affect the construction of identity. These actors are state and non-state and agents both from within and within the identity community (Goff and Dunn, 2004: 6); and (4) multiplicity - international relations actors may have multiple identities. These various identities are constantly in play and the possibility of switching between them in a relatively smooth way is very real (Goff and Dunn, 2004: 7).

Starting from there, the concept of identity that is changeable, unstable, unconstructed, and diverse can be used as a conceptual framework in this paper. Identity can change, strengthen itself, or transform like the four conceptual frameworks above. And the *asabiyyah* theory will explain further about collective identity.

Asabiyyah, which etymologically can be understood as 'a sense of belonging in a group', is a social theory put forward by Ibn Khaldun. Historians, who used to live from place to place, include *asabiya* in the second chapter of the famous *Muqaddimah* (Introduction). *Muqaddima* is just an introduction to *Kitâb al-'Ibar*, a history book he wrote. And in that part of the book there are different social theories, including *asabiyyah*. According to Ibn Khaldun, *asabiyyah* is a sense of belonging that binds a group of people together (Khaldun, 1982). He further explained that groups that have *asabiyyah* will be able to endure the difficulties of living in a desert environment (Khaldun, 1982: 219-221). At the beginning of the chapter, Ibn Khaldun explained that *asabiyyah* here is an interpersonal relationship according to blood and family (Khaldun, 1982). For a better explanation, the easiest way to explain *asabiyyah*, here are some simple explanations, (1) strong leadership of a group can be achieved with a strong sense of belonging within the group (Khaldun, 1982, 226); (2) there is a difference between *asabiyyah* according to blood and *asabiyyah* which was built by a group of people who built a city together and married because of it (Khaldun, 1982, 227-229); and (3) *ashabiyyah* without blood and family ties can also be achieved if there is an employer who employs another person who is not related or makes him a slave, or establishes a relationship as a business partner. Until a certain time, they will have a sense of connection. In this case, a relationship that is too strong will diminish his *asabiyyah* with his family (Ibn Khaldun, 1982, 230-233).

In addition, Ibn Khaldun also explained that there are several challenges if *asabiyyah* leadership has been achieved in a group. The emphasis is on a person or group of leaders who are chosen through the nature of *asabiyyah* in it. If they hold the position for a long enough period of time and with a large enough area, the *asabiyyah* will be much more difficult to maintain. A large area with a large population will make the next generation have a sense of belonging. This situation can fade *asabiyyah* that has existed before (Ibn Khaldun, 1982, 240-242). The fading of *asabiyyah* will weaken the unity of a group (Ibn Khaldun, 1982: 243-246). And it will continue with disintegration and end the fate of a group (Ibn Khaldun, 1982).

Therefore, *asabiyyah* is a sense of belonging in a community group. This feeling can be built with family and blood relations or other similarities as a background. The existence of *asabiyyah* can strengthen the existence of groups in various sectors. In addition, the election of leaders according to their *asabiyyah* will be more acceptable. However, if the leadership stands in its place for a long time or over a very wide area, *asabiyyah* is likely to fade. Fading *asabiyyah* can weaken a group. And a weak group can be defeated by another group.

This approach above will be used in this qualitative research. The qualitative method is suitable to understand social issues and to analyze the data was collected through literature studies from (journal articles, books, or online articles) and personal interviews with Indonesian Jewish prominent community individuals. This gives an authentic understanding of their point of view. After the data is collected, the analysis will use the approaches above to examine the phenomenon of the Indonesian Jewish identity and nationalism. These are methods as explain by John and David Creswell (2018).

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Who are the "Jewish People"?

The question "who are 'the Jewish people'?" becomes the beginning of the discussion. Most people have observed the existence of Jewry more after the establishment of the State of Israel. The definition of nationality and identity, as explained in the theoretical section above, may be defined as constructed. However, this modern Jewish identity has been mostly defined in exile.

The identity of a nation or people is not ethnically defined as one of French philosophers Étienne Balibar (1990) stated in the *Nation Form: History and Ideology*

"No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them, are ethnicized—that is, represented in the past or in the future as if they formed a natural community."

Starting with this assumption, the Identity of Jewish people is not an exception. Hans Kohn (1939), a Zionist of Czech-German origin, once formulated that western nationalism (that later influenced Zionism in the West) is a voluntary nationalism, which means there is no outside intervention. It may differ from Eastern nationalism that is built through a historical journey involving outsiders - This can be observed in Indonesian nationalism. To talk about Jewish nationalism, we have to start from the beginning.

Jewish people trace their history back to the Pentateuch where it begins with God's creation of the world, followed by the era of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, until their exodus out from Egypt. And the narrative is continued through books of Kings and Chronicles until the time of Zachariah. And it remains a historical narrative according to the Jews particularly their claimant of their ancestral land of Israel. However, the earliest Jewish historian was Flavus Josephus who was the first to attempt to investigate Jewish history. And there are no other Jewish historians up to the modern time. And Shlomo Sand (2009)

in his book the *Invention of the Jewish People* reminded that the biblical truth is not a universal "truth". Instead, it is a certain narrative from a group of people. Then, who are the Jews and their history?

Other than the biblical narrative, Max Isaac Dimont wrote a book entitled "*Jews, God, and History*". Dimont (2004) provided a secular and popular historical narrative of Jewish people. Instead of writing the storyline from the time of Moses and the exodus, he only wrote a minimum small aspect of belief and started the story by criticizing Jewish belief and continued into the era of the early Israeli Kingdoms in the Canaan, present day Israel. Dimont is an American historian who tried to write the book as secular as possible and based on historical evidence. And based on his book, we could understand that Jewish history had begun for a long time in the land of Israel until the expulsion of Jews by the romans that ended the long history of Jewish kingdoms in Canaan when the land name is changed into Palestine by the Romans. It was the time when Jews are forced to be scattered in many corners of the globe.

In early 1900s, an American physicist Maurice Fishberg argue that Jews are no different as other religious groups. And he argued that there is no such thing as a Jewish Race since Jewish people differ physically from one geographic area to another (Oster, 2012). This scientific research on Jewish genealogy then contested by a Jewish genealogist Chaim Sheba and Richard Goodman in 1960s. However, the findings are complicated since they found a diverse traits and disease amongst Jewish communities in Israel. By this time, we may consider Jewish people as a group of people based on their religion and their sense of belonging as a community.

The sense of belonging of Jewish people was first proposed by Theodor Herzl and the Zionist movement in 1800s Europe. During this time, Europe was a continent full of romanticism of nationalism. And Jewish people do not belong to any nations of Europe. An example, even though France had granted Jewish people with French citizenship, Jewish people remained facing prejudice from other French citizens. The Zionist movement started to shape a modern Jewish identity in Europe and later in Israel. However, the Zionist ideas is faded in 21st Century Israeli diverse society, it remains prevalent in the Constitution of Israel, Israel foreign and domestic policy, and among world's Zionists.

Being "Jewish" According to Israel's Law of Return

Speaking of Jewish Identity, it is also important to understand who the Jewish people are according to Israeli legal perspective. In Israel, there are some different understandings about being Jewish according to Jewish law and a secular Israeli law. However, the Israeli legal definition plays a big role in determining a person's right to *aliyah* (return to the Jewish homeland).

According to Jewish religious law or *Halacha*, an individual must acquire some criteria to be classified as a Jewish person. These include the ancestry that characterize as primacy of matrilineality (Oster, 2012). These criteria must be evaluated by rabbis so the person's identity as a Jew can be determined through Jewish canonical law. Some jews

even need to 'convert' when their ancestry is not coming from their mother. Hence, religiously, Jewishness is determined by *Halacha*.

The matrilineal Jewry later manifested to the Law of Return of Israel (Knesset, 2021) point 4B "For the purpose of this Law, 'Jew' means a person who was born of a Jewish mother or has become converted to Judaism and who is not a member of another religion." In this case, a Jewish person may or may not come from a Jewish ancestry. A convert to Judaism can also be categorized as a Jewish person. This shows both stiffness and fluidity of identity of individuals. The identity of Indonesian Jewish and nationalism, therefore, can also be restricted (descended from a Jewish mother) or fluid (convert to Judaism from other religion).

Indonesian Jews History

Not so many people have chance to meet or talk with a very tiny Indonesian Jewish community or has chance to be exposed with Jewish history, particularly in Indonesia. Judaism in Indonesian archipelago has been going through many historical phases. And today, we can categorize Indonesian Jews as descendants according to Jewish law (*Halacha*), patrilineal descendants who must convert themselves into Judaism, and non-descendants converts. They have slightly different identities and sense of belonging (*asabiya*) to Indonesia and/or Israel.

The earliest record of Judaism in Indonesia is the record of thirteen centuries followed by records along with Arab traders and European explorers (Franke, 2013). In the mid 19th Century, an Jew of Romanian descent, Jacob Havelly Saphir, visited the archipelago and reported that some Jewish community existed in Batavia, Surabaya, and Semarang. The Jews were not in a form of community since they are a family or individuals and possessed neither synagogues nor cemetery. These Ashkenazi Jews were somehow ashamed by their Jewishness and chose to practice their religion privately. However, some Jews from Baghdad, Iraq, or Afghanistan are more visible but categorized as Arab descent by the Dutch administration (Franke, 2013)

After the World War II, Indonesian Jewish population remained numerous in the Archipelago. By this time, we could divide Jews into three categories: Dutch Jews (Jews of European origin who has assimilated into Dutch culture), Jews of Middle Eastern origin (mainly of Sephardic tradition from Baghdad, Afghanistan, and many other places in the Middle East, they mainly settled in Surabaya), and Ashkenazi Jews from various parts of Europe (mainly had assimilated into Indonesian culture). The numbers were still hundreds in Batavia, Surabaya and Bandung (Hadler, 2004).

In the following years, unstable Indonesian political situation during the Sukarno's administration affected the numbers of Indonesian Jews to decrease. According to Rotem Kowner (2011), the number of Indonesian Jews at this point is less than 20. However, as some of Ashkenazi Jews had intermarried with local Indonesians, this number might be lower than the real numbers of Jews in the country. And this condition had also localized Jewish communities in Indonesia into regional communities or individuals. The Jewish congregational or communal activity started to be invisible until recent years.

The current situation of Jews in Indonesia is varied in from one place to another. And their visibility also different adjusting with their surrounding whether to identify or not and using the Jewish symbolism or not. Jewish communities and individuals in Java are less visible. Only their friends and neighbors who know their actual identity and they tend to accept it. A community that is more visible to public is the Jewish community in Manado, North Sulawesi. They are accepted by the surrounding public and openly practice their religion, along with having synagogue to congregate on Saturdays (*Shabbat*).

Edith Franke (2013) shared her experience about the condition of what was the only synagogue in Surabaya during the years of 2000s. This synagogue has no longer existed since it was demolished to be converted as an Apartment. Franke argued about the Islamic extremist groups who reacted to the situation in Palestine. The demolition made possible by the argument of the guardian that the building that belongs to the Jewish community has lost its congregation. I see it differently, since an apartment was built on the top of what used to be a synagogue, it is possible that the extremist group was part of a bigger scheme to accelerate the handover of the land to the apartment developer. This argument is supported by Rabbi Yaakov Baruch of Minahasa in my interview (Baruch, 2021).

A living Jewish community today exists publicly in Minahasa, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Franke (Franke, 2013) argued that this is a positive example of Jewish visibility in Indonesia. Members of this tiny Jewish community are mainly the descendant of Dutch Jews who had secretly practice or even had left the Torah and practiced Christianity or Islam. And this community is led by Rabbi Yaakov Baruch. He later tries to reconnect his Jewish roots and some other Jewish elders and descendants to return to the Torah.

The Minahasa Jewish community's visibility is supported by its surrounding social environment. North Sulawesi is a province in Indonesia where Christianity is the main religion in the province. This Christianity consists of many different denominations. Evangelical Christianity is one of them. This denomination also emphasized Jewish return to Israel. And at this point, the Jews and Christians can live side by side openly in this region.

Contemporarily, Indonesian Jewish community can be categorized as three, people who are Jewish descents and practicing Judaism, people who to some extent have Jewish ancestry but it is cannot be defined by Halacha (and most of them do the conversion), an non-Jewish descents who converted into Judaism. Indonesian Jews also divided into Minahasa community and Jakarta community. Jews in Minahasa are mainly people of Sephardic Jewish origin and some converts. And many Jews in Jakarta are divided into two communities, Eits Chaim (for Jewish descents) and Bnei Noah (for Jewish converts from non-Jewish ancestry, mainly Indonesian). And they have similar perspective about their nationality and identity.

In the last decade some Indonesians of foreign ancestry, mainly European, claim to have Jewish blood. However, many of them are only sympathizers of Judaism and Israel. According to Rabbi Baruch (Baruch, 2021) many of them were unable to prove their Jewry line. Some Indonesian true Jewish descents tried to encourage this people to accept the

fact that they are not Jewish descent and convert as other non-Jews to convert and accept Judaism. And lately, many of them converted and start to practice Judaism.

Unlike Christianity or Islam, Judaism is not a missionary religion. This religion is only for the Jews and its people. However, Judaism is open for non-Jews to convert and become part of the Jewish community. The process of conversion into Judaism by non-Jews is harder than people who has already got Jewish bloodline (for those who was born with the Jewish bloodline not from their mothers). For example, a non-Jew who wish to convert to Judaism will experience rejections during the conversion process, since the rabbis need to be sure that this person's conversion is serious. Some rituals, such as Shabbat (Saturday as a resting day according to Jewish law), are not obliged by the converts of non-Jewish origin. However, they are collectively Indonesian Jews. Here is where we are going to begin to discuss about Indonesian Jewish identity and their attachment to the land of Israel.

Between Indonesia and Israel

As discussed earlier in this paper, Israel is the Jewish homeland according to both historical evidence and biblical narrative. Some of Jewish mitzvah (religious obligation) are also only can be fulfilled if a Jew has lived in the land of Israel, particularly Jerusalem. And according to Jewish belief they will be brought back to the land of Israel when Messiah has come to make them return to their homeland. This religious belief is somehow contradictory with the existence of the State of Israel. Since Israel was built under a secular Zionist foundation, some Jews do not really belief that they are obliged to return to Israel. And this point of view remains strong in Indonesian Jewish community. And moving to Israel is the matter of personal choice.

Some mitzvot that is associated with the land of Israel are *Orlah* and *Kilei Hakarem* in agriculture and sharing the dough of challah bread with the priest of the holy temple. *Orlah* is a prohibition to eat a fruit from their trees before three years of planting in the land of Israel. *Orlah* means 'uncircumcised'. Secondly, *Kilei Hakarem* is prohibition to grow crops together with grapevines in the land of Israel (Bloom, 2021). And lastly, a Shabbat bread of Challah is meant to be shared with the priest in Jerusalem. However, since there is no longer a temple in Jerusalem the tradition of Orthodox Jews is to burn it in the oven before it is baked or after. These are some mitzvot that associated with the land of Israel. In this case, Indonesian Jews is not an exception to not doing the mitzvot to be fulfilled to the land of Israel.

Other than mitzvot, Judaism and its biblical narrative is strongly attached with the land of Israel. In the Jewish belief, the return to the land of Israel or *Aliyah* must be fulfilled after the Messiah come and bring all Jewish people to the land of Israel. Wherever the Jews live today, this belief and connection with the land of Israel remains a part of Jewish belief. According to Rabbi Yaakov Baruch, the establishment of the state of Israel is unreligious but the recognition of the state is undoubtable reality (Baruch, 2021). And in spite of religious and emotional relations with the land of Israel, Indonesian Jews are Indonesian citizens who happened to be believing in Judaism faith.

Who are Indonesians and Indonesian Nation?

Before we talk about Indonesian Jewish position regarding the nationality and their emotional relations with the land of Israel and Indonesia, we need to clearly define who are Indonesian people. In the middle of 19th Century, the concept of Indonesian nation first coined by European anthropologist Jorge Richardson Logan and George Windsor Earl within *the Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*. During that time, the concept of "Indonesians" referred to the people of East Indies / Indian Archipelago or commonly known as Maritime Southeast Asia today. The word "Indonesia" came from two greek words *India* means "India" and *Nesos* means "island" or "archipelago". Thus, Indonesians are people of Indian Archipelago (Jones, 1994).

Later the word was used during the awakening period of Indonesian nationalism. In the early 20th Century, this word referred to every single individual who fought the Dutch, despite of any racial backgrounds (native Indonesians, Chinese, Arabs, Indian, or Europeans). And by the time of independence, some party like Partai Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Party) see Europeans in Indonesia as non-Indonesian and they should not get any Indonesian citizenship. This might be the contrary of the early spirit of Indonesian nationalism that include people of foreign ancestry with the sense of belonging to the land of Indonesia. This view was the view of Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo of Indische Partij (Indian Party) who sees that Indonesians consists of many people from many different backgrounds who have sense of belonging to Indonesia (Rocha & Fozdar, 2019).

The view that Indonesians are a racial concept of people who are originated in Martitime Southeast Asia has gradually changed. This is align with what Muhammad Yamin, Amir Sjarifuddin and some other Indonesian founding fathers that Indonesian nation consists of *suku-bangsa* (a smaller 'nations' within the bigger concept of Indonesian nation) that are integrated part of an Indonesian nation (Elson, 2009). And in the year 2000s, many terms and words that differentiate the native Indonesians with Indonesian citizens of foreign ancestry are reduced to avoid any racist consequences against non-native Indonesians (Gayatri, 2019). This modern concept of Indonesian nationalism can be concluded as a voluntary national identity by anyone who are willingly to be identified as an Indonesian. And everyone who holds Indonesian citizenship are considered as part of Indonesian nation in spite of ancestral background (foreign or native).

Jewish position in Indonesia

After we know a brief history of Jews in Indonesian archipelago, who are the Indonesian Jews, their relationship with the Land of Israel, and the definition of Indonesian nation, we can see how these circumstances has shaped Indonesian Jewish Identity. Their identity is alterable, fluid, constructed, and multipliable. Indonesian Jews undoubtedly have a stronger sense of belonging (*asabiya*) with the land where they were born and raised, Indonesia.

The identity of Indonesian Jews since the time of Dutch colonization of the archipelago has shown that it was altered for several occasions. As already discussed earlier, Dutch Jews are more likely to hide their Jewish identity to be assimilated with

the Dutch. And Middle Eastern Jews was able to assimilate themselves into Arab communities in the archipelago. At this time there was tendency to alter their identity because of social and political condition of the archipelago. Many intermarriages with locals by Jews of European origin had also discouraged continuity of Indonesian Jewish identity to be passed to the next generation. This phenomenon has also shown the fluidity of an identity.

One thing that people rarely explore deeper on the Jew who had accepted the identity as an Indonesian. He is Charles Mussry. He fought against the Dutch occupation along with other Indonesians in the famous battle on November 10, 1945 (Harsaputra, 2013). Unfortunately, the ignorance of his participation of the battle had caused the demolition of the only Synagogue in Surabaya in 2013. The synagogue had been the location for anti-Israeli protests prior to its demolition. We observed the issue of anti-Semitism that fueled the demolition but somehow, it is merely implausible, since today, the site has converted into 17 story hotel.

Until the early 21st Century when few later generations of Indonesians from Jewish origin began to retrace their identity through evidence, possess by their family. Rabbi Yaakov Baruch is the pioneer of reviving Jewish community in Indonesia. During this process, Indonesian Jewish identity is reconstructed as a new religious and communal identity among the Jewish people in Indonesia. During this process, some issues occurred. Some Indonesians claimed if their European ancestry was Jewish ancestry. This condition cannot be accepted by the community, since a person must be able to prove their ancestral Jewry. And Jews in Indonesia also could be categorized as three, Indonesian Jews with matrilineal Jewish bloodline, Indonesian Jewish descent of patrilineal line (he/she must convert into Judaism), and non-Jews who believe and practice Judaism.

From the interview from individuals of Eits Chaim, Bnei Noah, and Minahasa Jewish Community, Indonesian Jews. Generally, they have similar point of view of modern nationalism. They have both emotional ties with the Land of Israel and Indonesia. As Rabbi Yaakov Baruch (2021) explained "Indonesian Jews are Indonesian citizens with Judaism as their religion. Therefore, we [Indonesian Jews] are obliged to be good Indonesian citizens, and we are part of Indonesian nation." He also added about their relation with Israel that "Indonesian Jews have religious and emotional ties with the Land of Israel particularly Jerusalem, as Indonesian Muslims have religious and emotional ties with Mecca and Saudi Arabia. We pray three times a day facing Jerusalem." In this case, many Indonesian Jews have stronger sense of belonging to Indonesia but still have religious ties with the Land of Israel. Baruch later added that we must differentiate between the term the Land of Israel and the State of Israel. Some orthodox Jews, including those in Indonesia, even though they have emotional ties with Israel, they disagree with the existence of the State of Israel (as a secular state) since its establishment is not in accordance with Jewish Messianic tradition to return with the Messiah (Baruch, 2021).

Moreover, according to Elisheva Stross (2021), an Indonesian citizen with paternal Jewish descent who is active in Eits Chaim Indonesia, many Indonesian Jews love Indonesia and have the sense of belonging to the country. As identity can be altered, fluid,

constructed, and multiplied, many Indonesian Jews who develop stronger faith into Judaism must eventually leave the country despite of their attachment to the archipelago. Starting after the Indonesian independence, sequenced by the establishment of the State of Israel, many Baghdadi Jews moved to Beverly Hills, California, the US, and Ashkenazi Jews left for Singapore, Australia, or the Netherlands (Stross, 2021). Once a Jew decided to follow the Halacha, observing more mitzvah, they will be faced with some consequences. As an example, to observe Jewish Holiday in the month of Tishrei where a Jew could spend more time for religious holiday, there are no legal basis for a company to accommodate their holidays. Moreover, kosher food is still an elusive commodity in Indonesia. Thus, moving out into a country where they can practice their faith better is the only option (Stross, 2021). This point of view is more for the Ashkenazi Jewish community in Indonesia.

As Ibn Khaldun said in his *Muqqadimah*, there must be a different sense of belonging between *asabiyya* of natural bloodline and if it was built by a group of people. A community of Bnei Noah for example, this community is a community of Jewish convert from gentile origin. They have a less stronger ties with the Land of Israel. Since they have different mitzvot that they are not obliged to do as those who are from Jewish descent, they also do not see the importance to make *aliyah* and return themselves to Israel. Leo Yuwono, a member from Bnei Noah, added that they are different from Jews of Jewish descent. The converts are not obliged to stay in Israel, and also not obliged to observe the Shabbat (Yuwono, 2021). They also emphasize on the importance of being an Indonesian and having identity as an Indonesian.

However, there are challenges for Indonesian Jews living as an Indonesian. Public perceptions on the Judaism in general and Indonesian Jewish communities in particular. Stross (2021) said that it is difficult for Eits Chaim Indonesia to have a mailing address when they intended to have a small office and received refusal from the surrounding neighborhood. And in Minahasa, when the community established a Holocaust Museum in 2022, it received negative reactions from Indonesian netizens on Twitter. Words such as "Barbaric Zionism", or "Insulting Indonesian Muslims" are some reactions to Majelis Ulama Indonesia's (Indonesian Ulema Council) statement that the museum was manifested by Zionist ideology and hurt Palestinians (Muslim Cyber Army, 2022).

Misunderstanding on the Jewish community and inability to differentiate Judaism from Zionism will always be a challenge for Indonesian Jews to live in Indonesia. Ignorance of the past history and reluctance to accept the Indonesian Jews by some Indonesians into the greater Indonesian society create a bumpy road ahead for the communities. However, by trying to understand the communities better by other communities, the Jewish community can contribute more for the country more than Charles Mussry did in the past.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the conceptualization of a State-Nation that has been in Indonesia since the awakening of Indonesian nationalism in early 20th Century has shaped the

nationalism stronger among Jewish people. And Israel with its concept of Jewish nation and Nation-State is facing the orthodox Jewish belief in Indonesia that the state is illegitimate and irreligious. However, even though they possess a stronger tie to Indonesia the emotional and religious relationships to Israel still strong among Jews Indonesia, especially in Jews by matrilineal descent.

Indonesian Jews have already passed through different historical events that altered their identities. Jewish community has successfully assimilated into local community and culture. Their identity has frequently changed to adapt many social environments. In the case of Indonesia, the European concept of nation-state is not applicable since Indonesia is full of *suku bangsa*. And the post-colonial concept of State-Nation is more accepted in the case of Indonesia.

Two main Jewish community have the strong similar attitude about their nationality and the sense of belonging to Indonesia. They love Indonesia. However, the main difference between Minahasa's Sephardic community and Jakarta's Ashkenazi community, they have different attitude about the urge to move to another country. Move to other country is not necessarily Israel, despite of its importance in Judaism.

This article calls for further research on the communities and Indonesian society as a whole. Since there are many things about Jewish communities in Indonesia that have been explained to the Indonesian public. From the research, it is also shown that misunderstanding and ignorance from most of Indonesians to the Jews is inevitably caused by antisemitic sentiments over Israeli-Palestinian issue. However, not all events are fueled by antisemitism, some of them, such as the demolition of the Surabaya synagogue, is more economically motivated. This article itself is still lack of explanations about the Indonesian public reception to the Jewish communities. This is important for the future understanding to strengthen Indonesian national identity of unity and diversity.

REFERENCES

- Balibar, E. (1990) "The Nation Form: History and Ideology", *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 13(3), pp. 329-381.
- Baruch, Y. (2021) *Personal Interview*. Interview by Mohamad Utama.
- Ben-Ami, S. (2000) Introduction. In: *Ethnic Challenges to the Modern Nation State*. New York: St. Martin Press, Inc., pp. 1-10.
- Bloom, M. (2021) *Mizrachi World Movement* (Online). Available at: <https://mizrachi.org/mitzvot-associated-with-the-land-of-israel-and-outside-of-israel/> (Accessed: 2 August 2021).
- Davis, U. (1994) "Being Jewish in the Context of Israel", *Dialectical Anthropology*, November, 19(2/3), pp. 211-235.
- Diamont, M. I. (2004) *Jews, God, and History*. New York: New American Library.
- Elson, R. E. (2009) *The Idea of Indonesia*. s.l.: Penerbit Serambi.
- Ford, H. (1920) Are the Jews a Nation?. In: *International Jew*. Johannesburg: Global Printing and Publishing Co, pp. 25-34.

- Franke, E. (2013) Searching for Traces of Judaism in Indonesia. In: *Between Mumbai and Manila: Judaism in Asia since the Founding of the State of Israel*. Bonn: Bonn University Press.
- Gayatri, I. H. (2019) *Tionghoa dan Ke-Indonesia-an: Komunitas Tionghoa di Semarang dan Medan*. s.l.:Yayasan Pustaka Obor.
- Goff, P. M. & Dunn, K. C. (2004) Introduction: In Defense of Identity. In: P. M. Goff & K. C. Dunn, eds. *Identity and Global Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-8.
- Hadler, J. (2004) "Translations of antisemitism: Jews, the Chinese, and violence in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia", *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 32(94).
- Harsaputra, I. (2013) *Group Protests Synagogue Demolition* (Online). Available at: <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/09/17/group-protests-synagogue-demolition.html> (Accessed: 2022).
- Jones, R. (1994) "George Windsor Earl and 'Indonesia'", *Indonesia Circle, School of Oriental & African Studies*, 22(64).
- Khaldun, I. (1982) *Muqadimah Ibnu Khaldun: Suatu Pendahuluan dari Karangan Ibnu Khaldun tentang Sejarah*. Jakarta: CV Fauzan.
- Knesset (2021) *the Law of Return* (Online). Available at: <https://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/return.htm> (Accessed: 2 May 2021).
- Kohn, H. (1939) "The Nature of Nationalism", *The American Political Science Review*, 33(6), pp. 1001-1021.
- Kowner, R. (2011) *Inside Indonesia: Indonesia's Jew* (Online). Available at: <https://www.insideindonesia.org/indonesia-s-jews> (Accessed: 2 May 2021).
- Mely, T. G. (1997) *The Ethnic Chinses in Indonesia: Issues of Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Muslim Cyber Army (2022) *Twitter* (Online) Available at: <https://twitter.com/MCAOps/status/1488907489114345473> (Accessed: 5 December 2022).
- Oster, H. (2012) *Legacy: A Genetic History of the Jewish People*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Rocha, Z. L. & Fozdar, F. (2019) *Mixed Race in Asia: Past Present and Future*. s.l.:Routledge.
- Sand, S. (2009) *The Invention of the Jewish People*. London: Verso.
- Sepan, A., Linz, J. J. & Yadav, Y. (2011) *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- Stross, E. (2021) *Personal Interview*. Interview by Mohamad Utama.
- Tsadik, D. (2012). Identity among the Jews in Iran. In: *Iran Facing Others: Identity Boundaries in a Historical Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 219-242.
- Yuwono, L. (2021) *Personal Communication*. Interview by Mohamad Utama.