JUDAISM IN AMERICA: THE IMPLICATION OF THE SOCIAL CHANGES OF AMERICA JEWS TOWARD THE REALIZATION OF THE NEW ISRAEL

Agama Yahudi di Amerika: Implikasi Perubahan Sosial Bangsa Yahudi di Amerika terhadap Realisasi Negara Israel Baru

Witriani1 dan Kodiran2

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INISIARI

Teisini merupakan studi tentang Agama Yahudi, sebagai bagian dari kenyataan maupun budaya bangsa Yahudi, mengingatnya terhubung dengan perubahan sosial dalam kehidupan masyarakat Yahudi di Amerika serta solidaritas mereka terhadap Israel.

Studi ini merupakan studi pustaka dan menggunakan pendekatan interdisiplinasi yang diperluas dalam disiplin ilmu Pemikiran Amerika.

Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa untuk menjadi bagian dari bangsa Amerika, bangsa Yahudi telah mengalami perubahan-perubahan yang menimbulkan berbagai aspek kehidupan mereka. Perubahan-perubahan ini tidak hanya membawa bangsa Yahudi tetapi juga membawa bangsa Amerika.

Mengingat Yahudi telah menjadi bagian dari bangsa Amerika, bangsa Yahudi telah mendapatkan apa yang selama ini mereka cari.

Selain itu, studi ini juga membahas bagaimana agama Yahudi merupakan inspirasi bagi tetap dan berkembangnya solidaritas bangsa Yahudi bagi Israel. Meskipun ide negara Yahudi mendapat tegangan yang pro dan kontra di antara bangsa sendiri, tetapi tragedi Holocaust, sejatinya men yesan bangsa Yahudi dan membangkitkan semangat mereka untuk merujukkan negara Israel, sebagai pusat peradaban dan kebudayaan Yahudi. Melalui mobilisasi kaum Zionis, negara Israel langsung sahih ini tidak hanya didukung secara penuh oleh bangsa Yahudi di Amerika, tetapi juga oleh pemerintah Amerika.

Kata-kata kunci: Agama Yahudi — reformasi — perubahan sosial — solidaritas — Israel.

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INTRODUCTION

Long before they came to America, the Jews were well known as ‘nomadic’ society’. They used to move from one place to another to find a better life to live. As recorded in the Hebrew Bible, the earliest moving happened when the Israel did the exodus under leadership of Moses to find Canaan, the land God had promised them. Since then, through the civilizations, this ethnic has happened hundreds time of migration, exclusion, split into many races, and moved from one country to another.

Since the Europeans discovered a New World, the Jews were one among the immigrants who thought that America was ‘the promised land’ to make their dreams come true. The discovery of the New World gave a new hope of the scattered Jews to establish a better life.

American Jews came from many countries such as the lands of Europe, North Africa or Middle East. This gave them a special characteristic or quality of the countries they came from, both the tradition or culture and knowledge or skill. For example, the oldest Jewish immigrant came from Brazil to New Amsterdam (New York) were Sephardic, and their religious culture and ritual practice followed the Babylonian tradition of Jewish law and observance. The newcomers were Ashkenazim, Jews of German origin who followed a combined Babylonian and Palestinian tradition in law and ritual practice using Northern European forms. Because of this, as Corbett (2000:95) says, the American Judaism was fragmented into a mosaic of language and patterns of belief and practice, overlaid by clashing cultural differences. However, these differences do not make them apart. This fragmentation challenged the strong Jewish sense of peoplehood and unity and set the stage for the development of the varied styles of Judaism that have remained important in the present.

Here, one thing that seems to unite them as American Jews is Judaism. They were different in culture, way of life, or even in the religious practices, but they believe in the same doctrine, Torah and the same God, Yahweh.

Today, among the immigrants who come and make a living in the New World, the Jewish is the most prominent and the wealthiest community in America. This condition is also the same with their effort in the education and profession that lead them as ‘the elite class’ of American society.

However, having success in America in some aspects also seems to lead a way for the Jewish people to realize a State of Israel. It is noted in Guiding Principle of Reform Judaism (1937), that for the Jews, Judaism is

*Winston, et al., Judaism in America...

the soul and Israel is the body.

The Jews in America

Like most of the Europeans background of the migration to the New World, the Jews, came to America mostly because of wars, political upheavals, religious dissents and persecutions, economic crisis and poverty. However, like the other settlers, the Jews could breathe the air of religious freedom and optimistic life that they did not get in ‘the old world heritage’.

Jews had love affairs with America. In the United States they had found a country where they lived as full citizens with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. Jews felt more completely at home than they had in the lands from whence they had come (Corbett: 1997: 97)

The Changes of American Jews

Life in America introduced a significance change in Jewish life. Jews could become full citizens and have to live among Americans of various races and religions.

America, with the democratic and capitalist system, has given much opportunity to all immigrants including the Jews, to develop and reach various chances. Among the immigrants, it is Jews who were prominent in catching the chances. That is way, through a few decades, the Jews could become the prominent figure in American economic system.

By about 1960, the majority of Jews in America had achieved the acceptance they sought. Today, they continue to lead the nation in education, professionalism and income and are a noteworthy presence in politics and culture (Corbett: 1999: 116).

In order to come this step, the Jews, of course experienced many changes, both internal and external. These changes are not only as consequence of the geographical condition as immigrants who found a better life both in economic and politics in their new land, but also on culture and theology.

Being Americans, the Jews should reform themselves both on religion and culture. In America, they no longer lived in the ghettos that separated them from the other communities. Reformation and changes on Judaism are considered necessary in order to eliminate and narrow discrepancy between the Jews religion and Christian. Wherever possible, they should adapt it to modern life. For instance, in the area of doctrine the concept of nationality became identified in modern times with politi-
many Orthodox and Conservative Jews believed that they would find their redemption on American soil rather than in the land of their ancestors. They saw Zionism as a secularist misunderstanding of Jewish hope.

Moreover, this rejection could be seen from the response of American Jews to migrate to the homeland. Although a number of American Zionists choose to make Aliyah (returning to the homeland) and committed to becoming pioneers in Palestine, this percentage was extremely small. On the contrary, the spirit of this change only could be seen in Europe. European Zionists rather viewed their own futures as tied to their homeland. They saw themselves as personally involved with farming the land, rebuilding the soil or creating a distinctly Jewish homeland. Zionism for them was a way of life rather than simply a political strategy (American Jewish Desk Reference, 1999: 197-198).

However, the social, economic and political changes in the US and the worldwide in the years immediately before and during World War I, increase enthusiasm for Zionism, especially among the newer immigrants.

The Increasing Factors of Solidarity For Israel

Koentjaraningrat (1983: 273) states that religious emotion would be a push factor to do the religious activities including solidarity. Here, in the name of a religion, one could do anything to show his solidarity and empathy. Israel State has been the main issue among the American Jews in the 20th century. Moreover, the Jews from various parts of the world are not only tied on the same religion, Judaism, but also on the same ethnic, as descendants of an ancient Hebrew. For more than four thousand years, they have experienced so many segregation, exclusion, which push them scattered. That is why solidarity among the Jews seems to be closer and solid.

1. The change of the Messiah concept

For centuries, the Jews believed that one day would come a messiah, when the entire Jewish people, the whole congregations of Israel, would reassemble as one in an un unified land of Israel. This Messiah comes to glorify man bringing him praise the God. Through generations, the Jews and kept waiting for the Messiah who would transform the world.

However, since Reform Judaism has been declared in the 19th century and increased in America, it rejects a personal Messiah. Messiah is not really believed as a person who would bring the Jews into the redemption as the Christians believe in Jesus, but a messianic movement in which all the Jews are invited to realize it. Although this thought in some
aspect was refused by many groups of Jews especially by the Orthodox, it continued to increase especially among the American Jews.

2. The change of Zionism concept

Zionist organization under the leadership of Louis Brandeis (1856-1941) began to reformulate Zionism concept. Under this reformulation, one did not have to choose between being a Zionist and being an American. One could have a dual loyalty if the two philosophies supported each other.

Departing from this point, solidarity toward Israel gradually increased among the American Jews. For the next two decades, there are Zionists Organizations (ZOA) in America: the Federation of American Zionists (FAZ), the largest Zionist coalition in the US, the New Palestine Organization, the Women's Zionist Organization in America and many other organizations. The political and financial support from American Jews and American government increased. For example, the leadership of Louis Brandeis gained considerable influence, persuading Wilson to support a Jewish homeland and pressure the British government into making the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (American Jewish Year Book, 1999: 177).

Here, according to Hudson (1981: 973), the basis of this new solidarity in American Jewish community was not “religious” in historic sense, nor was it Torah centered. They responded as a political group.

3. The Jews position in America

Since the Jews' arrival in the Colonial period until the mass migration in the 19th Century, the Jews have established a permanent settlement in America. They have achieved what they sought for a long time, American Jews have been the prominent figure of American immigrants.

This condition leads the American Jews have much time to think of their brothers' fate and their own fate in their homeland. There is a great desire to share what they have got to the Jews who has no Jewish State have become the main issue of American Jews during this century that seems to unify them.

4. The Holocaust Impact (1930s - 1940s)

The Holocaust is the period of persecution and extermination of almost six millions of European Jews by Hitler and his Nazi. This tragedy not only brought a great impact on European Jews, but also on American Jews. It fundamentally determined the evolution of American Zionism. In response to the growth of Nazism in Germany, the Central Conference of American Rabbis agreed to re-evaluate the Pittsburgh Platform, which was adopted in 1885. Led by Abba Hillel Silver, the Zionist faction proposed a new set of Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism (1937) which considered that it is a necessity for Jews to build a Jewish homeland, not only as a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also as a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life. As a consequence of this, in the 1930s and 1940s, thousands of new members enlisted in ZOA, Hadassah, and other Zionist groups. Thus, by 1947 the American Zionist movement had nearly one million members. They came to a conviction that some form of nationalism was a necessity for the survival of their people in Diaspora. As World War II got more intensive and the killing of European Jews increased, the Jewish community in the US viewed a safe haven for Jews as a priority.

Furthermore, at the end of the war for example, a number of the Jewish prominent liberals, including many Christians, had become Zionist supporters. Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the most respected Christian theologians in the US, spoke out frequently to support the Zionist idea. He stated that because the war had left millions of Jews ‘homeless’ and ‘disenfranchised’, the world had an obligation to provide the Jews with home (Rose, 1997: 56).

This support also could be seen when the State of Israel was established in 1948. American Jews raised sums of money via United Jewish Appeal to help resettle refugees. This focus on Israel remains a powerful unifying force for American Judaism (Corbets, 2000: 113).

Furthermore, for American society itself, the horror of war and the determination of innocent women, children, and men, by the Nazi regime greatly arise a sense of humanism. That tragedy served to reduce anti-Jewish sentiments. In two decades following World War II, anti-Semitism showed a marked decline (Rose, 1997: 56).

Forms of Solidarity

After World War II, State of Israel has become the pre-eminent issue in American Jewish life. Some changes on ideology - mainly about point
of view toward Israel's State - and the fear caused by the Holocaust - is more intense and total. As Gaustad says, American Jews discovered then that to save Israel, political pressure was mobilized, large sums of money were borrowed in a short time, and thousands of US volunteers left to fight. In Judaism, their commitment to Israel, after the World War II this was possible for some Jews to separate their commitment to no longer possible. Israel has become the Jewish religion for American Jews (A Documentary History of Religion in America, 1983: 448)

Economic

Since the concept of the Jewish State was launched, the Jews from various parts of the world were invited to support this idea. To create a new state is neither ridiculous nor impossible. The plan of this new state is simple in design but complicated in execution.

To realize this plan is not an easy task to do. It needs an economic support from the worldwide Jews. Following World War II for example, the World Zionist organization was established to mobilize the broad-based Jewish support for Palestinian Jewry and increase the annual revenues of the Jewish Agency (1929) in an effort to enlist non-Zionist Jewish support for the national home in Palestine. Besides, there is also the Jewish National Fund (JNF) or Keren Kayemeth Le Israel in Hebrew, set up in 1901, of the Jewish people.

Through these organizations, the Zionist financed its movement. It is possible for Jews all over the world were used to buy land in Palestine for the 'eternal possession'.

In America, for years the majority of American Jews had given a total support to the State of Israel. During the War of Independence in Israel defend itself against the Arab neighbor more than $375,5 million during the Six Day War in 1967 (American Jewish Desk Reference, 1999: 178). These financial aids are still doubted by the American government. Because, since the official recognition of the State of Israel by President Truman, American Foreign Policy has committed to the existence of the Jewish homeland.

According to Findley (1993: 166), since the United States has given its recognition to the State of Israel, this new nation has got a special "treatment" in financial support from the United States. For example, between 1949-1991, the United States government at least has donated $35 billions to Israel, in the form of financial aids and benefits. This amount is almost 13% of economic and military of US aids to the whole nation of the world of that period.

Politics and Military

Besides economic, political foreign support is a fundamental requirement of a nation's continuity. Zionism, which is based upon the importance of the Jewish people as a nation, is mainly a political movement. Through its organization, Zionists tried to marshal political foreign support that would not only help to bring such a state into being but also would insure its stability and safety in the future.

As it is explained above, the Jewish organization in America such as ZOA, AIPAC, Hadassah and even the religious organizations, the Reform Judaism, Orthodox or Conservative has constantly become the 'true' Zionists tool in gaining political support in America, both from American Jews and American government. The one commitment that is universally shared in American Jewry is to make sure that the foreign policy of the US does not turn against Israel.

The earliest political achievement by Jews for example was done when Brandeis gained influence during Woodrow Wilson's reign. This provided a commitment for Jewish homeland to be established after the war. But the most important political gain is when Harry Truman's government recognizes the provisional government as the de facto authority of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. Truman was the first major leader to recognize Israel, (eleven minutes after Israel declared its independence).

After World War II and Israel's State was established, Jewish organization have been dedicated in protecting this new state. The Jewish political lobbying is much focused on such organization like AIPAC.

AIPAC, founded in 1951, began as an amalgam of fourteen leading American Zionist groups with the goal of providing unified public relations arm for the new Jewish State. AIPAC's growth and influence began shortly after the Six-day war in early 1973s in a very short time it has become one of the most powerful lobbying groups in the US, and one of the leading forces shaping the Washington's Middle East policy (American Jewish Desk Reference, 1999: 178).

The Washington Lobby (1987: 79) calls this organization as "one of the more effective lobbying organizations in Washington". Most of Jew-
A question arises why the Jews lobbying become so effective in achieving access in Congress and in the White House, part of their leadership and the educated and politicized nature of their constituents (Corbetts, 2000: 35).

**United States – Israel Relation**

The relationship of Jewry and America has been begun since the tinent. Some similarities on ideology, point of view toward the country, the Jews were accepted and welcomed in America.

An ability of American Jews to gain success in America has directly transformed this ethnic to be an elite minority who has bargaining power both on American society and American government. As Corbetts (1999: 360) says, although Jews constitute less than three per cent of the American population, they have influence and access to policy makers disproportionate to their size. Here, there are several reasons for this:

1. Jews have higher than average income and education, and got impressive achievements in many areas in society. That is why, although they are never more than 4% of the American population, they have led to have greater influence.

2. Jews have been very active in America politics. The Washington Lobby (1987: 80) quotes Thomas A. Dine, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC): "Two thousand years of painful experiences have forced us into round-the-clock political activity."

3. The geographic concentration of many Jews in politically crucial states (e.g. New York), has meant that the national political party organizations could not ignore Jewish votes. It is not that, since their mass migration to the US, most of Jews were concentrated in New York. By 1910 for example, there were a million and a quarter Jews in New York City. They then formed more than a quarter of the population of the city and formed about two-fifths of all the Jews in the US.

4. Hertcke (1989a: 274) argued that Jewish groups have been successful in achieving access in Congress and in the White House because of the quality of their leadership and because they are active and energetic.

However, since the State of Israel was established, the relationship between Israel and US is more focused on bilateral government. The State of Israel has looked to the US government for economic, military and political support.

Since President Harry Truman recognized the de facto authority of the State of Israel, America has become the important partner for Israel and vice versa. For example, when Richard Nixon became president, he declared the Jewish State to be a vital strategic asset in the Cold War. On the contrary, for the next three decades, American support for Israel increases dramatically, with multibillion dollars aid packages and major arms sales (American Jewish Desk Reference, 1999: 185).

Why does Israel become so special for America? There are many arguments about this. Some say that facilities and protections from America have been viewed as analogous to Jewish power or so-called Jewish conspiracy. Such a perspective makes an assumption that the Jewish lobby subverts United States policy against its own best interests in favor of Israel (American Jewish Desk Reference, 1999:185). This assumption is based on the policies resulted by American government for many decades that always stand for Israel's national interest. A close relationship between these countries is not merely just between American and Israeli, but gradually strengthened by American government. However, American government argues that its foreign policy to
ward Israel is both rational and pragmatic. As Ronald Reagan says, "our relation with Israel is based on the national interest." (Findley, 1993: 31)

When Jewish State has become a major military asset for the United States in the region, capable of assembling a massive array using American-made weaponry. Thus, increasingly, the US government seems to need Israel almost as much as it needs the US. (American Jewish Digest Reference, 1996: 180)

A folklorist even describes this relationship as

Henry Kissinger and Golda Meir

Soon after Henry Kissinger was appointed Secretary of State, he wrote to Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel: "As you know, I have been appointed Secretary of State. I very much hope that we shall be able to work well together for the benefit of our countries. In order that there may be complete understanding between us, I trust that you will always be aware of my priorities, which are in this order: I am an American citizen, Secretary of State and a Jew.

To which Golda Meir replied: Your letter makes me very happy. Now I am sure that we shall all agree in complete accord.

P.S. I am sure that you are aware that in Israel we read from right to left.

(from Jewish Failure in America by David Max Eichhorn)

It is implied from that folklore how total support toward Israel became so important between the two countries. Israel and its continuity has seemingly become the first priority for the American Jews.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


