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## Bani Israil in the Qur'an and Modern Israel: Symbolic Continuity and Political Discontinuity of Jewish Identity

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### Abstract

This article aims to analyze the relationship between Bani Israil in the Qur'an and modern Israel by proposing the framework of symbolic continuity and political discontinuity of Jewish identity. The study arises from the tendency in contemporary religious and media discourse to conflate Bani Israil, Jews, Zionism, and the State of Israel into a single identity. Such conflation presents an academic problem because the Qur'an uses the term Bani Israil in a historical-religious context related to the descendants of Prophet Ya'qub, prophetic experiences, divine covenants, transgressions, and moral admonitions. In contrast, modern Israel is a nation-state formed through Jewish nationalism, political Zionism, colonialism, the British mandate, and twentieth-century geopolitical configurations. This research employs a qualitative library-based method with a historical-genealogical approach. The primary data consist of Qur'anic verses concerning Bani Israil, Jews, Hādū, and Ahl al-Kitāb, while supporting data include tafsir literature, Jewish history, Zionism, modern Israel, identity theory, and relevant contemporary media. The study finds that modern Israel cannot be directly identified with Qur'anic Bani Israil because they differ in political structure and historical context. However, modern Israel is not entirely disconnected from Jewish tradition, as it employs names, symbols, territorial memory, and genealogical narratives to legitimize its national identity. Thus, the relationship between the two is best understood as symbolic continuity alongside political discontinuity. This article contributes to Qur'anic and Jewish identity studies by formulating symbolic continuity and political discontinuity as a proportional framework that distinguishes Qur'anic moral-genealogical categories from modern nationalist and legal-political constructions of Israel.

**Keywords:** *Bani Israil; Qur'an; modern Israel; Zionism; Jewish identity*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The terms Bani Israil, Jews, Zionism, and modern Israel are often used interchangeably in contemporary religious, political, and media discourse. In public conversations, Bani Israil mentioned in the Qur'an is frequently understood as identical to modern Jews, the Zionist movement, or even the State of Israel established in the 20th century. Although this conflation appears simple, it presents serious academic problems. The Qur'an mentions Bani Israil as a historical-religious community associated with Prophet Ya'qub, Prophet Musa, the Exodus, divine covenants, blessings, transgressions, and moral admonitions. In contrast, modern Israel is a nation-state that emerged through Jewish nationalism, political Zionism, the British mandate, migration, war, and 20th-century international politics.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Qur'anic verses concerning Bani Israil cannot be read as directly referencing modern Israel without adequate textual, historical, and genealogical explanation.

This issue becomes more significant because the Qur'an does not use a single category for communities associated with Jewish traditions. The terms Banī Isrā'īl, al-Yahūd, Hādū, and Ahl al-Kitāb each carry distinct semantic, historical, and theological contexts. In this study, Banī Isrā'īl is treated primarily as a Qur'anic historical-religious community, with genealogical roots in the lineage of Prophet Ya'qub and a moral-theological function as recipients of divine covenants and admonitions.<sup>2</sup> Research by Salime Leyla Gürkan shows that Bani Israil is one of the most frequently mentioned communities in the Qur'an, whereas references to Jews appear under al-Yahūd, Hādū, and Ahl al-Kitāb in different contexts. Therefore, the central question is not merely whether Bani Israil equals the Jews, but how the Qur'an differentiates genealogical, religious, moral, and communal identity. This distinction is critical to prevent oversimplifying Qur'anic categories into modern political categories.

In the Qur'anic construction, Bani Israil primarily appears as a historical-religious community. They are traced to Israil, i.e., Prophet Ya'qub, and placed within a long prophetic history. Classical tafsirs such as Jāmi' al-Bayān explain Bani Israil as descendants of Israil who are the subjects of Qur'anic exhortations, warnings, and admonitions concerning divine blessings and covenants.<sup>3</sup> Ibn Kathīr interprets Qur'anic verses regarding Bani Israil in Surah al-Baqarah as reminders of divine blessings, salvation from Pharaoh, and obligations to uphold covenants.<sup>4</sup> Modern Israel, however, exists in a different historical horizon. The idea of a modern Jewish state gained prominence through Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* (1896) and developed through the history of political Zionism until the declaration of Israel on May 14, 1948.<sup>5</sup> This difference in horizon makes it inappropriate to equate Qur'anic Bani Israil directly with modern Israel.

The contemporary relevance of this issue can be seen in ongoing debates surrounding Israel's identity in international politics. Cases such as the use of biblical narratives in Israeli political rhetoric, legal disputes before the International Court of

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, with Internet Archive (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> Salime Gürkan, "Jews in the Qur'an: An Evaluation of the Naming and the Content," *Ilahiyat Studies* 7 (December 2016): 163–206, <https://doi.org/10.12730/13091719.2016.72.148>.

<sup>3</sup> Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 8 (Badar Hajar, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> smā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (Dar Tayyibah, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Theodor Herzl, *A Jewish State, an Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, with Princeton Theological Seminary Library (New York, The Maccabean Pub. Co., 1904).

Justice, the implementation of the 2018 Nation-State Law, and public controversies involving Israel in international sporting events demonstrate that the meaning of "Israel" remains contested across religious, legal, and political domains.<sup>6</sup> These debates highlight the importance of distinguishing between Qur'anic Bani Israil and the modern State of Israel while also examining the symbolic links that connect them.

This gives rise to the risk of anachronism, which is reading Qur'anic verses about Bani Israil as if they directly refer to modern Israel. Such reading imposes twentieth-century nation-state categories onto a historical-religious text. Anachronistic interpretation obscures distinctions between Qur'anic communities and the modern state system of sovereignty, law, and citizenship. In this study, Jewish identity is understood as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing ethnic, religious, cultural, and national dimensions, which interact differently in Bani Israil, historical Jewish communities, Zionism, and modern Israel. Therefore, Qur'anic verses must be read within tafsir tradition before comparison with modern identity.

However, entirely disconnecting modern Israel from Bani Israil is also inappropriate. Modern Israel is not Bani Israil in the Qur'anic sense, but it employs the name "Israel," Hebrew language, Jewish symbols, territorial memory, and return narratives as the basis for national legitimacy. In nationalism theory, modern nations are often shaped by shared narratives, symbols, language, and imagined communities. Benedict Anderson describes a nation as an imagined political community, while Anthony D. Smith emphasizes the importance of collective names, origin myths, historical memory, homeland, shared culture, and ethnic solidarity in constructing national identity.<sup>7</sup> Maurice Halbwachs also asserts that collective memory is formed within social group frameworks.<sup>8</sup> Through this lens, the relationship between modern Israel and Jewish tradition can be understood as symbolic continuity, rather than a direct political identification with Qur'anic Bani Israil.

The interdisciplinary literature used in this study should be understood not as separate discussions, but as mutually connected analytical layers. Qur'anic semantic studies and tafsir literature provide the first layer by clarifying that Banī Isrā'īl, al-Yahūd, Hādū, and Ahl al-Kitāb are Qur'anic categories with different semantic, historical, and theological functions. Gürkan's study is important in this regard because it shows that Qur'anic references to Jews and Bani Israil cannot be collapsed into a single undifferentiated identity.<sup>9</sup> Sulaeman's discussion of Israel in Islamic texts further demonstrates the relevance of this issue in contemporary Muslim discourse, although his work does not specifically formulate the analytical boundary between Qur'anic Bani Israil and the modern State of Israel.<sup>10</sup> Historical studies on Zionism and the establishment of Israel form the second layer. They explain how Jewish identity and memory were transformed into a modern political project through nationalism, migration,

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<sup>6</sup> "ICJ Genocide Case: Israeli Rhetoric against Palestinians Central to South Africa's Case | AP News," accessed May 21, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-south-africa-genocide-hate-speech-97a9e4a84a3a6bebeddfb80f8a030724>.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, with Internet Archive (Reno : University of Nevada Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, with Internet Archive (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Gürkan, "Jews in the Qur'an."

<sup>10</sup> Otong Sulaeman, "Israel dalam Teks-Teks Agama Islam," *Jurnal ICMES* 2, no. 1 (2018): 86–107, <https://doi.org/10.35748/jurnalicmes.v2i1.19>.

colonial administration, and state formation.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Qur'anic studies define the textual category, while historical studies explain the transformation of Jewish identity across time.

The third layer is provided by nationalism theory, collective memory studies, and identity theory. In this article, symbolic continuity is not proposed as an entirely original concept detached from previous theory. Rather, it is formulated as a conceptual synthesis derived from studies of nationalism, collective memory, and materialized cultural identity. Studies on collective memory show that national identity is shaped through selective remembrance, public narratives, and socially organized memories of the past.<sup>12</sup> Heersmink's study further shows that cultural identity is materialized through artifacts such as symbols, texts, monuments, flags, calendars, and public objects that connect a community to its remembered history.<sup>13</sup> Cross-cultural research on national identity and collective memory also confirms that communities imagine themselves through shared historical references that are continuously interpreted in the present.<sup>14</sup> In this framework, symbolic continuity refers to the way modern Israel reactivates Jewish names, Hebrew language, territorial memory, symbols, genealogical narratives, and return narratives as resources of national identity. These elements create symbolic connection with Jewish tradition and memory, but they do not establish direct political identity with Qur'anic Bani Israil.

The fourth layer is supplied by constitutional and legal-political studies on modern Israel. These studies support the notion of political discontinuity by showing that modern Israel institutionalizes Jewish identity through the mechanisms of a modern state. Ben-Youssef and Tamari show that Israel's Nation-State Law legally enshrines Jewish identity within a political-constitutional framework.<sup>7</sup> Harel similarly argues that the Basic Law entrenches Israel's Jewish character within its constitutional structure.<sup>15</sup> Wattad demonstrates that the same law affects the symbolic and legal status of Arabic in relation to Hebrew, indicating that language functions as part of state identity formation.<sup>16</sup> Medina and Bloch further show that Israel's national identity has undergone constitutional transformation through debates on Jewishness, democracy, and the legal definition of the state.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the literatures interact in a systematic way: Qur'anic and tafsir studies define the religious-textual category; historical studies trace Jewish identity's transformation into Zionism and statehood; memory and nationalism studies explain symbolic continuity; and constitutional studies establish political discontinuity. This

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<sup>11</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar et al., "Sejarah Zionisme dan Berdirinya Negara Israel," *Jurnal Adabiyah* 16, no. 2 (2016): 172–84, <https://doi.org/10.24252/JAd.v17i116i2a7>.

<sup>12</sup> Geneviève Zubrzycki and Anna Woźny, "The Comparative Politics of Collective Memory," *Annual Review of Sociology* 46, no. Volume 46, 2020 (2020): 175–94, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054808>.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Heersmink, "Materialised Identities: Cultural Identity, Collective Memory, and Artifacts," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 14, no. 1 (2023): 249–65, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-021-00570-5>.

<sup>14</sup> Nadia Ben-Youssef and Sandra Samaan Tamari, "Enshrining Discrimination: Israel's Nation-State Law," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 1 (2018): 73–87, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2018.48.1.73>.

<sup>15</sup> Alon Harel, "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People," *Nationalities Papers* 49, no. 2 (2021): 262–69, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.127>.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammed S. Wattad, "The Nation State Law and the Arabic Language in Israel: Downgrading, Replicating or Upgrading?," *Israel Law Review* 54, no. 2 (2021): 263–85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021223721000078>.

<sup>17</sup> Barak Medina and Ofra Bloch, "The Two Revolutions of Israel's National Identity," *Israel Law Review* 56, no. 3 (2023): 305–19, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021223723000225>.

integrated framework prevents both anachronistic identification and complete historical separation between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel.

Existing scholarship has addressed important parts of this problem, but generally within separate analytical domains. Gürkan and Sulaeman clarify Qur'anic and Islamic-textual categories, yet they do not systematically relate these categories to modern nation-state identity. Studies on Zionism and Israel's establishment explain historical-political formation, but they do not begin from Qur'anic semantic distinctions. Legal studies of the Nation-State Law show how Jewish identity is constitutionalized in modern Israel, yet remain outside Qur'anic hermeneutics. Therefore, the gap is not the total absence of distinction, but the lack of an integrated framework that connects Qur'anic category, Jewish memory, Zionism, and state identity through symbolic continuity and political discontinuity.

The novelty of this article does not lie in proposing symbolic continuity and political discontinuity as concepts detached from previous scholarship, but in adapting them into an integrated Qur'anic-historical framework. Symbolic continuity is derived from nationalism theory, collective memory studies, and cultural identity theory, which explain how communities construct identity through names, symbols, language, territorial memory, and shared narratives. Political discontinuity is grounded in modern nationalism and state theory, which distinguish a nation-state from pre-modern religious or genealogical communities. The distinctive value of this framework lies in its application to the relationship between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel. It connects Qur'anic semantic distinctions, Jewish memory, Zionism, and modern state identity without collapsing them into one category. Therefore, the contribution of this article is not merely terminological, but analytical: it prevents both anachronistic identification and complete historical separation between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel.

This study employs qualitative library-based research as an interdisciplinary textual inquiry combining Qur'anic thematic analysis, historical analysis, genealogical analysis, and conceptual synthesis. It is library-based because the study works with written materials—Qur'anic verses, tafsir works, historical narratives, legal-political documents, and academic literature—through systematic documentation and critical interpretation rather than field or statistical data.<sup>18</sup> The approach used in this study is historical-genealogical. The historical dimension traces chronological transformations from Qur'anic Bani Israil to Jewish identity, Zionism, and modern Israel. The genealogical dimension, however, is not used in a strictly Foucauldian sense of exposing regimes of power/knowledge, nor is it limited to biological lineage tracing. Rather, genealogy is understood here as historical-identity tracing, namely an analysis of how identity markers are transmitted, transformed, and reactivated across different historical contexts. Its theoretical basis lies in studies of genealogy, collective memory, and cultural memory, which show that identities are formed through names, symbols, narratives of origin, social remembrance, and institutionalized memory.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, genealogical analysis differs from historical analysis: historical analysis follows chronological development, while genealogical analysis examines the continuity, discontinuity, and reactivation of identity markers within that development.

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<sup>18</sup> Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, "'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,'" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Cornell University Press, 1977.

The primary data are divided according to the two domains examined in this study. In the Qur'anic domain, primary data consist of verses related to Banī Isrā'īl, al-Yahūd, Hādū, and Ahl al-Kitāb, because these verses constitute the main textual basis for analyzing Qur'anic categories. In the modern-state domain, primary data consist of legal-political documents that formulate or institutionalize Jewish national identity, especially the Balfour Declaration, the Palestine Mandate, the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel, the Law of Return, the Nationality Law, and Basic Law: Israel—The Nation State of the Jewish People.<sup>1</sup> These documents are categorized as primary data not because they possess the same normative status as the Qur'an, but because they function as foundational texts for examining modern Israel's legal-political self-definition. Secondary data consist of classical and modern tafsir works, as well as studies on Jewish history, Zionism, nationalism, identity theory, collective memory, and recent international journal articles.

Data were collected through documentation using a thematic-exegetical procedure. Verses were selected when they explicitly mention Banī Isrā'īl, al-Yahūd, Hādū, or Ahl al-Kitāb, then classified by context: genealogy, covenant, prophecy, moral admonition, or interreligious relations.<sup>20</sup> Tafsir sources were selected from representative classical and modern works and compared to identify semantic, theological, and historical interpretations before comparison with modern legal-political sources.

Data were analyzed through textual, historical, comparative, and conceptual procedures. Textual analysis examined Qur'anic terms by considering wording, thematic context, and tafsir interpretation. Historical analysis traced identity transformation through indicators of genealogy, religious community, diaspora memory, Zionism, state formation, law, and citizenship. Comparative analysis distinguished Bani Israil, Jews, Zionism, and modern Israel according to identity basis, historical horizon, institutional form, and source of legitimacy. Conceptual analysis then synthesized these distinctions into symbolic continuity and political discontinuity. Symbolic continuity denotes the reactivation of names, symbols, Hebrew language, territorial memory, genealogical narratives, and return narratives, while political discontinuity denotes the shift from Qur'anic community to modern nation-state.

## 2. DISCUSSION

### 2.1 *Historical-Genealogical Identification Results of Bani Israil and Modern Israel*

This section presents the main findings from the processes of textual identification, tafsir reading, historical reconstruction, and genealogical analysis concerning the relationship between Bani Israil in the Qur'an and modern Israel. The findings are organized into four main points: first, the Qur'an constructs Bani Israil as a historical-religious community; second, Jewish identity underwent a transformation from a community defined by lineage and religion to a diaspora, ethnic, cultural, and political identity; third, modern Israel employs Jewish memory and symbols as national legitimization, yet remains a modern nation-state; and fourth, the relationship between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel is best understood through a framework of symbolic continuity and political discontinuity.

The first finding indicates that the Qur'an constructs Bani Israil as a historical-religious community. Instead of presenting all occurrences of Banī Isrā'īl in the main discussion, several representative verses are sufficient to show the dominant Qur'anic

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<sup>20</sup> 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Farmāwī, *Al-Bidāyah Fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍū'ī: Dirāsah Manhajīyyah Mawḍū'īyyah* (al-Ḥadārah al-'Arabiyyah, n.d.).

pattern. QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 40 and 47 recall divine favor and covenant, QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 83 and QS. al-Mā'idah [5]: 12 emphasize covenantal obligations, QS. al-A'rāf [7]: 137 and QS. Tāhā [20]: 80 refer to liberation from Pharaoh, while QS. al-Jāthiyah [45]: 16 highlights scripture, wisdom, prophethood, and provision.<sup>21</sup> These verses indicate that Bani Israil is constructed through genealogy, prophetic experience, covenantal privilege, and moral accountability. This supports the argument of political discontinuity: Qur'anic Bani Israil belongs to the horizon of revelation, covenant, and moral evaluation, not to the institutional structure of a modern nation-state.

Tafsīr readings reinforce this finding. Al-Ṭabarī explains that the term Bani Israil refers to the descendants of Israil, i.e., Prophet Ya'qub, but the Qur'anic address to them does not stop at lineage information. The address functions as a reminder of God's blessings and the demand to uphold covenants.<sup>22</sup> Ibn Kathīr, in his commentary on QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 40–61, emphasizes the memory of God's blessings to Bani Israil, particularly their deliverance from Pharaoh, the provision of shelter, food, and the requirement not to deny divine guidance.<sup>23</sup> Al-Qurṭubī also highlights the relationship between blessings, covenants, transgressions, and moral consequences in the verses concerning Bani Israil.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the Qur'anic construction of Bani Israil encompasses three layers: genealogical, prophetic, and moral. The genealogical layer is evident in their connection with Prophet Ya'qub; the prophetic layer appears in their relation to Prophet Musa and scripture; while the moral layer emerges in the evaluation of their obedience or transgression.

The Qur'an does not depict Bani Israil as a singular entity. On one hand, verses such as QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 47 and 122, QS. al-Dukhān [44]: 30–32, and QS. al-Jāthiyah [45]: 16 present the memory of historical excellence, the granting of scripture, wisdom, prophecy, and provision. On the other hand, verses such as QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 83–85, QS. al-Mā'idah [5]: 12–13, 70–78, and QS. al-Isrā' [17]: 4–8 offer critiques of transgressions, disobedience, and moral deviation. Al-Rāzī asserts that references to blessings in the verses concerning Bani Israil serve as theological arguments, since knowledge and historical grace should produce obedience rather than denial.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Qur'anic Bani Israil cannot be reduced to negative stereotypes, pure ethnic identity, or modern political categories.

The next findings emerge from the identification of the terms al-Yahūd, Hādū, and Ahl al-Kitāb. The form al-Yahūd appears, for example, in QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 113 and 120; QS. al-Mā'idah [5]: 18, 51, 64, and 82; and QS. al-Tawbah [9]: 30. These verses generally relate to the Jewish community's relations with other communities, whether in the context of religious claims, theological critique, or social relations. The form *al-ladhīna hādū*, or other derivatives from the same root, appear in QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 62, 111, 135, and 140; QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]: 67; QS. al-Nisā' [4]: 46 and 160; QS. al-Mā'idah [5]: 41, 44, and 69; QS. al-An'ām [6]: 146; QS. al-Nahl [16]: 118; QS. al-Hajj [22]: 17; and QS. al-Jumu'ah [62]: 6.<sup>26</sup> Salime Leyla Gürkan demonstrates that the Qur'an uses

<sup>21</sup> Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* (1971).

<sup>22</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Ay al-Qur'ān*, vol. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*.

<sup>24</sup> Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān* (Al-Resalah, 2006), [http://archive.org/details/20191231\\_20191231\\_1313](http://archive.org/details/20191231_20191231_1313).

<sup>25</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb Aw al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> "The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Word by Word Grammar, Syntax and Morphology of the Holy Quran," accessed May 21, 2026, <https://corpus.quran.com/>.

multiple names to refer to Jews and Bani Israil, so these terms must be read contextually rather than conflated into a single term.<sup>27</sup>

The category *Ahl al-Kitāb* is even broader. Verses such as QS. *al-Baqarah* [2]: 105 and 109; QS. *Āli ‘Imrān* [3]: 64–75, 98–113, and 199; QS. *al-Nisā’* [4]: 153, 159, and 171; QS. *al-Mā’idah* [5]: 15, 19, 59, 65, 68, and 77; QS. *al-‘Ankabūt* [29]: 46; QS. *al-Aḥzāb* [33]: 26; QS. *al-Ḥadīd* [57]: 29; QS. *al-Ḥashr* [59]: 2 and 11; and QS. *al-Bayyinah* [98]: 1 and 6 show that the Qur’an discusses the scripture-receiving community in various contexts: dialogue, critique, invitation to common belief, theological correction, and socio-religious relations. Holger Zellentin emphasizes that *Banī Isrā’īl*, *Ahl al-Kitāb*, and *al-Yahūd wa al-Naṣārā* should be read as categories evolving within Qur’anic discourse, not as fully identical identities.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, textual identification shows that the Qur’an does not use a single undifferentiated category for Jewish-related communities. Rather, it distinguishes *Banī Isrā’īl*, *al-Yahūd/Hādū*, and *Ahl al-Kitāb* according to different semantic, historical, and theological functions. This distinction is important because it prevents Qur’anic terminology from being transferred directly into modern political categories and supports the argument that Qur’anic *Banī Israil* and modern Israel are related but non-identical categories.

Table 2. Conceptual Comparison of *Banī Isrā’īl*, *al-Yahūd/Hādū*, and *Ahl al-Kitāb* in Qur’anic Discourse

<b>Qur’anic term</b>	<b>Main category</b>	<b>Dominant context</b>	<b>Analytical implication</b>
<i>Banī Isrā’īl</i>	Genealogical-historical	Prophecy, covenant, divine favor, moral responsibility	Cannot be reduced to ethnicity or modern state identity
<i>al-Yahūd / Hādū</i>	Religious-community	Theological claims, communal relations, law, critique	Refers to Jewish religious communities in specific contexts
<i>Ahl al-Kitāb</i>	Broader scriptural	Dialogue, invitation, correction, socio-religious relations	Includes Jews and Christians as scripture-receiving communities

The second finding shows that Jewish identity underwent historical transformation. Identity initially tied to lineage and religion later developed into diaspora, ethnic, cultural, and political forms. Shaye J. D. Cohen demonstrates that the boundaries of “Jewishness” in ancient and early rabbinic periods were shaped through a combination of descent, religious practice, law, social relations, and communal limits.<sup>29</sup> Martin Goodman further explains that relations between Rome and Jerusalem, especially the

<sup>27</sup> Gürkan, “Jews in the Qur’ān.”

<sup>28</sup> Holger Zellentin, “*Banū Isrā’īl*, *Ahl al-Kitāb*, *al-Yahūd Wa-l-Naṣārā*: The Qur’anic Community’s Encounters with Jews and Christians,” *Entangled Religions* 13, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.46586/er.13.2023.10991>.

<sup>29</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, with Internet Archive (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987).

destruction of Jerusalem and subsequent structural changes in Jewish life, greatly influenced the formation of Jewish memory and identity.<sup>30</sup> In a broader development, Norman Stillman shows that Jewish communities in the Arab-Islamic world experienced diverse socio-political circumstances, making Jewish identity not uniform.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Jewish identity in history is not a singular, unchanging identity but one continually reinterpreted.

In the modern context, Zionism transformed Jewish memory of ancestral land, exile, suffering, and hopes of return into a political nationalism project. Moses Hess, in Rome and Jerusalem, framed the Jewish question within the modern national context.<sup>32</sup> Leon Pinsker, in *Auto-Emancipation*, argued that the Jewish question required political emancipation, not merely social assimilation.<sup>33</sup> Theodor Herzl later articulated the idea of a Jewish state in *The Jewish State*, viewing the Jewish issue as a political problem requiring institutional solutions.<sup>34</sup> These findings show that Zionism is not merely a direct continuation of Qur'anic Bani Israil but a modern nationalist movement translating religious and historical memory into nationhood, homeland, migration, and political sovereignty.

Zionism itself is not monolithic. Ahad Ha'am, for instance, emphasized the importance of a Jewish spiritual and cultural center, critiquing the political Zionist focus solely on the state.<sup>35</sup> Walter Laqueur notes that modern Zionism comprises political, cultural, religious, and socialist currents, all interacting with European antisemitism, modern nationalism, and international political changes.<sup>36</sup> This transformation supports the framework of symbolic continuity because elements such as Jewish memory of land, exile, suffering, return, language, and communal identity persisted across historical periods, yet their function changed from religious-diasporic memory into resources for modern nationalism and state identity. At the same time, this transformation also confirms political discontinuity, because the institutional form changed from a religious and diasporic community into a modern nation-state. Thus, modern Israel cannot be read as a natural continuation of Qur'anic Bani Israil, but as a modern political formation that selectively reactivates Jewish memory within the framework of nationhood and statehood.

The third finding shows that modern Israel uses Jewish memory, symbols, names, language, land narratives, and genealogy as symbolic resources in the construction of national identity, without implying theological validation or political endorsement of any territorial or legal claim. This process is evident in modern political documents. The 1917 Balfour Declaration expressed the British government's support for establishing a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine.<sup>37</sup> The 1922 Palestine Mandate

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*, with Internet Archive (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book*, with Internet Archive (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979).

<sup>32</sup> Moses Hess, *Rome and Jerusalem: A Study in Jewish Nationalism*, with Internet Archive ([Brenigsville, PA]: Kessinger Publishing, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Leo (1821-1891) Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation* (1906).

<sup>34</sup> Theodor Herzl et al., *The Jewish State* (2008).

<sup>35</sup> 1856-1927 Ahad Ha'am and Leon Simon, *Selected Essays*, with University of California Libraries (Philadelphia: The Jewish publication society of America, 1912).

<sup>36</sup> Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*.

<sup>37</sup> "The Avalon Project: Balfour Declaration November 2, 1917," accessed May 21, 2026, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/balfour.asp?utm](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp?utm).

recognized the historical connection of the Jewish people to Palestine and provided an administrative basis for creating a Jewish national home.<sup>38</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947 recommended partitioning Palestine into Arab and Jewish states.<sup>39</sup> On 14 May 1948, the declaration of Israel's establishment linked the creation of a Jewish state with the land of Israel, Jewish history, the diaspora, and UN decisions. These documents demonstrate that modern Israel is founded within international legal frameworks, colonial mandates, territory, migration, and state institutions.

Nevertheless, Jewish symbolic elements remain a strong component of modern Israeli identity. The Basic Law: Israel—The Nation State of the Jewish People defines Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people, establishing the country's name "Israel," the Star of David flag, the menorah emblem, the national anthem Hatikvah, Hebrew language, Hebrew calendar, and relations with the Jewish diaspora.<sup>40</sup> The 1950 Law of Return grants Jews the right to immigrate to Israel, while the 1952 Nationality Law regulates citizenship within the modern state framework.<sup>41</sup> This shows that Jewish memory is not only narrative but institutionalized through law, citizenship, migration, and state symbols. However, institutionalization of Jewish symbols in the modern state does not make modern Israel identical to Qur'anic Bani Israil, as the forms, functions, and contexts differ.

The fourth finding shows that the relationship between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel is best understood through a framework of symbolic continuity and political discontinuity. Symbolic continuity is evident in the use of the name Israel, Hebrew language, Jewish symbols, ancestral land memory, Exodus and diaspora narratives, claims of return, and Jewish national identity. In Anthony D. Smith's theory, national identity is often constructed through collective names, origin myths, historical memory, homeland, shared culture, and group solidarity.<sup>42</sup> Benedict Anderson explains that the modern nation is an imagined political community formed through language, media, narratives, and a sense of togetherness.<sup>43</sup> This framework helps explain why modern Israel continues to activate Jewish memory to build national legitimacy.

However, symbolic continuity is not the same as direct identity. Maurice Halbwachs explains that collective memory is shaped within a social framework, so the past is not merely inherited but interpreted and reactivated by specific communities.<sup>44</sup> Jan Assmann also emphasizes that cultural memory is maintained through texts, rites, symbols, and institutions linking the present with the past.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the use of Jewish memory in modern Israel can be understood as the reactivation of historical symbols and narratives within the modern state structure. This relationship is symbolic-genealogical, not identically political.

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<sup>38</sup> "The Avalon Project: The Palestine Mandate," accessed May 21, 2026, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/palmanda.asp?utm](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp?utm).

<sup>39</sup> UN. General Assembly (2nd sess. : 1947 : Flushing Meadow, N.Y.), ed., *Future government of Palestine* (1948).

<sup>40</sup> "BASIC LAW: ISRAEL – THE NATION STATE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE," The Jewish Nation-State Law, n.d.

<sup>41</sup> "Israel: Nationality Law, 5712-1952," Refworld, accessed May 23, 2026, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1953/en/14615>.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *National Identity*.

<sup>43</sup> Benedict R. O'G (Benedict Richard O'Gorman) Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, with Internet Archive (London ; New York : Verso, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

<sup>45</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization : Functions, Media, Archives*, with Internet Archive (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Political discontinuity is evident in differences of historical context, institutional form, sources of legitimacy, and power structures. Bani Israil in the Qur'an exists within the horizon of revelation, prophecy, covenant, blessings, transgression, and moral-religious responsibility. Modern Israel exists within the horizon of nation-state, political nationalism, citizenship, parliament, military, international law, and geopolitics. Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as a modern political principle demanding congruence between political and national units.<sup>46</sup> Within this framework, modern Israel must be read as a modern nation-state, not a Qur'anic community. Therefore, the verses concerning Bani Israil cannot be read directly as literal commentary on contemporary Israel.

Analytically, these findings show that the relationship between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel cannot be explained through a single line of identity. The Qur'anic construction of Bani Israil works through genealogy, prophecy, covenant, blessing, transgression, and moral responsibility. Modern Israel, by contrast, works through nationalism, state law, citizenship, territory, institutional power, and international recognition. Therefore, the main question is not whether the two are absolutely connected or absolutely separated, but how Jewish memory is symbolically reactivated in modern Israel while its political structure remains different from the Qur'anic Bani Israil.

## 2.2 *Bani Israil in the Qur'an as a Historical-Religious Identity*

Bani Israil in the Qur'an should be read as a historical-religious identity rather than as a purely ethnic or political label. Al-Rāzī's interpretation of QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 40 shows that the Qur'anic reminder of divine favor functions as a theological argument that requires recognition of revelation and obedience to divine guidance.<sup>47</sup> Thus, the Qur'an recalls covenant, guidance, deliverance, and prophetic instruction not as neutral historical memory, but as ethical memory that links past privilege with moral accountability. This prevents two reductions: treating Bani Israil merely as a biological lineage or turning Qur'anic criticism into a fixed negative stereotype for all Jewish communities. The Qur'anic construction is therefore genealogical, prophetic, and moral at once: genealogical because it is related to Israil/Prophet Ya'qub, prophetic because it is connected with Prophet Musa and scripture, and moral because it evaluates obedience, transgression, and covenantal responsibility.

Terminological precision is necessary because the Qur'an does not use one undifferentiated label for Jewish-related communities. Gürkan shows that Bani Israil, al-Yahūd, and Ahl al-Kitāb appear in different Qur'anic contexts and should not be collapsed into one identity.<sup>48</sup> Zellentin similarly argues that Banū Isrā'īl, Ahl al-Kitāb, and al-Yahūd wa-l-Naṣārā function as distinct but related categories within Qur'anic discourse.<sup>49</sup> Recent studies of classical and modern exegesis also emphasize that Qur'anic terms must be read through textual structure, historical setting, social context, and hermeneutical development.<sup>50</sup> This terminological distinction is crucial for the present article because it shows that Bani Israil is primarily a historical-genealogical and moral

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<sup>46</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, with Internet Archive (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

<sup>47</sup> al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb Aw al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*.

<sup>48</sup> Gürkan, "Jews in the Qur'an."

<sup>49</sup> Zellentin, "Banū Isrā'īl, Ahl al-Kitāb, al-Yahūd Wa-l-Naṣārā."

<sup>50</sup> Selamat Bin Amir et al., "The Dynamism of the Social Literary and Hermeneutical Streams in Qur'anic Classical and Modern Exegesis Studies: A Critical Comparative Analysis," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 22, no. 2 (2024): 190–215, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-20240150>.

category, al-Yahūd/Hādū refers more specifically to Jewish religious communities in certain contexts, and Ahl al-Kitāb refers more broadly to scripture-receiving communities. Consequently, these Qur'anic categories cannot be transferred directly into modern labels such as Zionism or the State of Israel.

This reading also explains why Bani Israil functions as a moral category rather than a transferable political identity. Rashīd Riḍā reads the stories of Bani Israil as socio-religious lessons for the Muslim community, especially concerning the consequences of disobedience and the danger of reducing religion to group formalism.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, Bani Israil serves as a cross-communal moral mirror: the Qur'an recalls their history to formulate ethical warnings, not to define a modern state. The difference becomes clearer when Qur'anic categories are compared with modern nationalism. Gellner defines nationalism as a modern political principle that seeks congruence between the political unit and the national unit.<sup>52</sup> Bani Israil in the Qur'an belongs to the horizon of revelation, prophethood, covenant, and moral responsibility, whereas the modern state belongs to the horizon of positive law, citizenship, territorial sovereignty, bureaucracy, military power, diplomacy, and international law. Thus, modern Israel cannot be mapped directly onto Qur'anic Bani Israil.

Indonesian scholarship further supports the need to distinguish layered Jewish identities. Kurniawan, Khoidir, Musa, and Fitriani note that Jewish history involves several designations, including Hebrew, Israel, and Jew, which are relevant for understanding Judaism and modern Zionism.<sup>53</sup> Roma Ulinnuha also emphasizes that Jewish identity involves continuity, discontinuity, and contradiction, and that the transition from Israelite religion to Judaism must be understood historically.<sup>54</sup> These studies support the argument that Bani Israil, Hebrew, Jew, Zionism, and modern Israel are historically connected but analytically non-identical. The analytical implication is central to this article: continuity exists at the level of memory, terminology, and tradition, but direct identification is prevented by historical transformation and political discontinuity.

Therefore, Bani Israil in the Qur'an is best understood as a historical-religious identity composed of genealogical, prophetic, and moral dimensions. This understanding establishes a methodological boundary between Qur'anic communal categories and modern political labels. It also prepares the next stage of analysis: Jewish identity may be connected genealogically and symbolically to Bani Israil, but Zionism and modern Israel must be examined as modern historical-political formations. In this sense, the verses on Bani Israil remain relevant for ethical reflection, yet their relevance to modern Israel must be mediated through textual, historical, genealogical, and conceptual analysis rather than direct equation.

### **2.3 From Jewish Identity to Zionism and Modern Israel**

This section analyzes the movement from Jewish identity to Zionism and modern Israel through three categories: genealogical transformation, symbolic continuity, and

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<sup>51</sup> Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-Ḥakīm: Tafsīr al-Manār* (al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1990).

<sup>52</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

<sup>53</sup> Dwi Kurniawan et al., "SEJARAH AGAMA YAHUDI," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 9, no. 1 (2023): 90–102, <https://doi.org/10.30651/ah.v9i1.16630>.

<sup>54</sup> Dr. Roma Ulinnuha, M.Hum., *Yudaisme & Studi Agama: Ikhtisar Agama Yahudi Dalam Perspektif Dimensi-Dimensi Agama* (SUKA-Press, 2021).

political discontinuity. Genealogical transformation refers to the historical movement of Jewish identity from descent and religious practice into diaspora, culture, nationalism, and state identity. Symbolic continuity refers to the persistence and reactivation of memory, land, language, ritual, suffering, and return narratives. Political discontinuity refers to the shift from religious-diasporic identity to modern institutions of nationalism, law, citizenship, and sovereignty.

These three categories are used as analytical indicators rather than merely as concluding labels. Genealogical transformation explains how Jewish identity changes form across historical contexts; symbolic continuity identifies which memories, symbols, and narratives persist; while political discontinuity marks the shift from religious and diasporic identity to modern institutions of nationalism, citizenship, and state law.

The first layer is genealogical transformation. Shaye J. D. Cohen shows that “Jewishness” in the ancient and early rabbinic periods was shaped through descent, religious practice, communal belonging, law, and relations with other peoples.<sup>55</sup> This indicates that Jewish identity was never a purely biological continuation of the Children of Israel, but a historically negotiated identity. David Biale’s *Cultures of the Jews* further shows that Jewish history developed through diverse cultural settings, including the Mediterranean, the Islamic world, Europe, North Africa, and modern Israel.<sup>56</sup> This diversity means that Judaism as religion, Jews as community, Jews as nation, and Israel as state must be analytically distinguished. Moreno and Karkason also show that Jewish identity after the establishment of Israel remained transnational, multilingual, and historically layered.<sup>57</sup> These studies support genealogical transformation: Jewish identity persists through historical memory, but its social form changes across diaspora, migration, culture, and politics.

The second layer is symbolic continuity. Diaspora made memory central to Jewish identity because identity could be maintained through sacred texts, ritual language, law, calendars, communal solidarity, the memory of Jerusalem, and hopes of return even without continuous political sovereignty. Martin Goodman’s study of Rome and Jerusalem shows that the destruction of Jerusalem and the transformation of Jewish life under Roman power deeply shaped Jewish historical memory.<sup>58</sup> This memory did not automatically become a modern state project, but it preserved symbolic resources that could later be reactivated. Friesel shows that the place of Israel within modern Jewish identity remains internally debated, which means that Jewish memory cannot be reduced to one fixed political meaning.<sup>59</sup> In this article, symbolic continuity therefore means not direct sameness, but the survival and reactivation of names, land memory, language, suffering, diaspora, and return narratives across changing historical contexts.

The third layer is the transformation of memory into nationalism. Moses Hess framed the Jewish question in the language of modern nationhood rather than merely religious belonging.<sup>60</sup> Leon Pinsker argued that Jewish emancipation required political

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<sup>55</sup> Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*.

<sup>56</sup> *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, with David Biale (New York: Schocken Books, 2002).

<sup>57</sup> Aviad Moreno and Tamir Karkason, “A Transnational *Millet* in the Jewish State: A Judeo-Spanish Diaspora between Israel and Turkey, 1948–1958,” *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 3 (2023): 1093–111, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12959>.

<sup>58</sup> Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem*.

<sup>59</sup> Evyatar Friesel, “Israel in Modern Jewish Identity: An Internal Debate,” *Israel Affairs* 27, no. 1 (2021): 57–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537121.2021.1864848>.

<sup>60</sup> Hess, *Rome and Jerusalem*.

self-organization rather than dependence on acceptance by other nations.<sup>61</sup> Theodor Herzl then articulated the Jewish state as an institutional and diplomatic solution to the Jewish question.<sup>62</sup> These figures show that Zionism transformed inherited religious and diasporic memory into a modern nationalist project. Ahad Ha'am's cultural Zionism also shows that Zionism was internally plural and not reducible to political statehood alone.<sup>63</sup> Laqueur likewise presents Zionism as a modern movement shaped by antisemitism, Jewish intellectual debates, nationalism, and European political change.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Zionism represents symbolic continuity because it reactivates Jewish memory, but also political discontinuity because it converts that memory into modern nationalism.

The fourth layer is modern Israel's institutionalization of Jewish identity through law and citizenship. The Law of Return of 1950 grants Jews the right to immigrate to Israel, while the Nationality Law of 1952 regulates citizenship through legal categories such as return, residence, birth, and naturalization.<sup>65</sup> These laws show that Jewish identity is not only remembered symbolically but also processed administratively by the modern state. Ben-Porat and Filc demonstrate that Jewish identity in Israel functions not only as religious identity, but also as a political marker of belonging, citizenship, and religious populism.<sup>66</sup> Ridge further shows that Jewish nationalism in Israel can be analyzed as a contemporary political phenomenon.<sup>67</sup> This legal-political formation confirms political discontinuity: Qur'anic Bani Israil is constructed through revelation, prophethood, covenant, and moral responsibility, whereas modern Israel regulates identity through law, migration policy, citizenship, sovereignty, and state institutions.

The analytical implication is that modern Israel cannot be understood either as a simple continuation of Qur'anic Bani Israil or as entirely disconnected from Jewish memory. The historical material shows a layered process: Bani Israil is a Qur'anic historical-religious community; Jewish identity develops through diaspora, law, ritual, culture, and memory; Zionism translates memory into nationalism; and modern Israel institutionalizes Jewish identity through state law. This is why the relationship is best described as symbolic continuity with political discontinuity. Jewish memory, names, land narratives, language, and return motifs persist, but their function changes from religious-diasporic identity into nationalist and legal-political identity. Therefore, the transformation from Jewish identity to Zionism and modern Israel should be read as genealogical transformation: continuity exists through memory and symbols, while discontinuity appears in the modern institutional form of nation-state, citizenship, and sovereignty.

#### **2.4 Symbolic Continuity and Political Discontinuity of Jewish Identity**

The framework of symbolic continuity and political discontinuity is the most appropriate way to avoid two forms of oversimplification at once. The first is the direct identification of modern Israel with the Qur'anic Bani Israil. The second is the complete

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<sup>61</sup> Pinsker, *Auto-Emancipation*.

<sup>62</sup> Herzl et al., *The Jewish State*.

<sup>63</sup> Ahad Haam and Simon, *Selected Essays*.

<sup>64</sup> Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*.

<sup>65</sup> "Israel: Law No. 5710-1950, The Law of Return," Refworld, accessed June 19, 2026, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1950/en/34127>.

<sup>66</sup> Guy Ben Porat and Dani Filc, "Remember to Be Jewish: Religious Populism in Israel," *Politics and Religion* 15, no. 1 (2022): 61–84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048320000681>.

<sup>67</sup> Hannah M. Ridge, "Jewish Nationalism in Israel: A Measurement," *Religions* 15, no. 7 (2024): 864, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070864>.

separation of modern Israel from Jewish tradition and the memory of the Bani Israil. Neither position is adequate. The first is anachronistic because it projects the modern nation-state into the Qur'anic text. The second is reductionist because it ignores the fact that modern Israel does employ Jewish names, language, symbols, territorial memory, and genealogical narratives.

This framework must be clarified from the outset because the relationship between the Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel cannot be explained through a logic of simple identity. The Bani Israil in the Qur'an belong to the horizon of revelation, prophethood, covenant, divine favor, transgression, and moral responsibility. Modern Israel, by contrast, belongs to the horizon of the nation-state, nationalism, positive law, citizenship, migration, diplomacy, war, and international law. The two are related through Jewish memory, the name Israel, the narrative of ancestral land, and religious symbols. Yet this relationship is not one of direct identity, but one that has undergone historical transformation. Therefore, the term "continuity" in this article does not refer to a linear biological or political continuity, but to symbolic continuity that operates through memory, names, rituals, language, and collective narratives.

To clarify the analytical structure of this framework, the relationship between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel can be presented through the following conceptual model.

Table 2. Conceptual Model of Symbolic Continuity and Political Discontinuity

<b>Analytical Dimension</b>	<b>Qur'anic Bani Israil</b>	<b>Historical Transformation of Jewish Identity</b>	<b>Modern Israel</b>
<b>Basic Character</b>	Historical-religious community	Religious, diasporic, cultural, and political identity	Modern nation-state
<b>Main Basis</b>	Genealogy, prophecy, covenant, divine favor, and moral responsibility	Memory, religion, law, diaspora, culture, and nationalism	State law, citizenship, territory, institutions, diplomacy, and international recognition
<b>Historical Horizon</b>	Qur'anic and prophetic history	Post-prophetic history, diaspora, rabbinic tradition, and modern nationalism	Zionism, British Mandate, migration, war, international law, and state formation
<b>Symbolic Continuity</b>	Sacred memory, covenantal narrative, and connection to Israil or Prophet Ya'qub	Preservation and transformation of Jewish memory, symbols, and return narratives	Use of the name Israel, Hebrew language, Jewish symbols, territorial memory, and return narratives

<b>Political Discontinuity</b>	Not a modern state and not structured by citizenship, parliament, or international law	Transitional identity shaped by changing historical contexts	Modern legal-political state with sovereignty, citizenship, law, military power, and international recognition
<b>Analytical Implication</b>	Cannot be directly equated with modern Israel	Explains the historical mediation between Qur'anic and modern identity	Symbolically connected to Jewish memory but politically discontinuous from Qur'anic Bani Israil

Source: Author's synthesis.

This model shows that the relationship between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel should not be read through direct equivalence. The continuity between them operates symbolically through names, memory, language, symbols, and narratives of return. The discontinuity operates politically through the difference between a Qur'anic historical-religious community and a modern nation-state. Thus, the framework helps the article maintain a balanced position: modern Israel is not identical to Qur'anic Bani Israil, but it also cannot be fully separated from the Jewish symbolic memory it employs.

Symbolic continuity is visible in the use of the name "Israel," the Hebrew language, the Star of David, the menorah, the memory of Zion, and the narrative of return. These elements are not merely decorative features of the state; they function as instruments for the formation of national identity. Ernest Renan argues that a nation is not formed merely by race, language, or territory, but also by shared memories, shared suffering, and the will to live together.<sup>68</sup> In the case of modern Israel, the memory of suffering, diaspora, and return functions as a foundation of national narrative. However, because a nation is formed through selected and organized memories, such continuity is constructive rather than biological or automatic.

The framework of cultural memory also helps illuminate this process. Aleida Assmann explains that cultural memory is constructed through oral transmission, media technologies, and institutional frameworks. She also emphasizes that cultural memory operates through forms such as writing, images, bodily practices, places, monuments, archives, and institutions that enable a group to connect the present with the past.<sup>69</sup> Modern Israel operates through similar mechanisms: the Jewish past is not merely remembered, but institutionalized through state symbols, national language, calendars, education, museums, immigration law, and public narratives. Therefore, the relationship between modern Israel and the Jewish or Israelite tradition cannot be severed entirely. There is symbolic continuity that works through memory, names, land, and narrative.

This institutionalization of symbols is explicitly visible in Basic Law: Israel—The Nation State of the Jewish People. The document states that the "Land of Israel" is the historical homeland of the Jewish people, that the State of Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, and that the right to national self-determination in the State of Israel

<sup>68</sup> "Internet History Sourcebooks: Modern History," accessed May 28, 2026, <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/mod/1882Renan-nation-eng.asp?utm>.

<sup>69</sup> Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*.

is exclusive to the Jewish people. The same document establishes the state's name as "Israel," its flag with the Star of David, the menorah as the state emblem, Hatikvah as the national anthem, Hebrew as the state language, the Hebrew calendar as an official calendar, and the state's connection with the Jewish diaspora.<sup>70</sup> Thus, symbolic continuity is not present only in public imagination; it is incorporated into the legal and symbolic structure of the state. Names, language, symbols, calendars, and diaspora memory are institutionalized as part of national identity.

Symbolic continuity is also reproduced through national ritual and public commemoration. Ariely's study of Independence Day in Israel shows that repeated national practices can strengthen national identity and shape the way citizens experience the nation in public life.<sup>71</sup> Sherzer's study of Israel's Declaration of Independence shows that a modern political document can be ritualized through Jewish textual and commemorative forms.<sup>72</sup> These studies clarify that symbolic continuity in modern Israel is not merely inherited from the past. It is actively produced through law, ritual, education, commemoration, public performance, and state narrative.

Nevertheless, political discontinuity remains decisive. The Bani Israil in the Qur'an are not a nation-state. They do not possess a modern parliamentary structure, do not operate through a system of citizenship, and do not function as subjects of international law. Modern Israel, by contrast, possesses state institutions, bureaucracy, a military, a legal system, citizenship, and diplomatic relations. Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as a modern political principle that demands congruence between the political unit and the national unit.<sup>73</sup> From this perspective, modern Israel is the product of modern nationalism, not the direct extension of a Qur'anic community.

The same process can be seen in recent studies of Israeli Judaism. Werczberger, Kaplan, and Beider show that Jewish renewal movements and Israeli Judaism can produce a form of soft religious nationalism in contemporary Israel.<sup>74</sup> This point is relevant because it shows that Jewish symbols and religious memories do not remain purely theological. They may enter the public sphere as cultural, national, and political resources. However, this does not erase political discontinuity. It only shows that modern Israel continues to reinterpret Jewish memory within the framework of nationalism and state identity.

This political discontinuity must be treated as a methodological boundary. If the Qur'anic Bani Israil are read as a modern state, the Qur'anic text is burdened with categories that do not belong to its political horizon. Conversely, if modern Israel is read merely as the natural continuation of the Bani Israil, then historical processes such as Zionism, colonial rule, the British Mandate, migration, the 1948 war, the formation of state institutions, and citizenship law disappear from analysis. Here, historical-genealogical reading must distinguish between memory as a symbolic resource and the state as a political construction. Memory may provide a language of legitimacy, but the modern state operates through institutions, law, territory, and administrative power.

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<sup>70</sup> "BASIC LAW: ISRAEL – THE NATION STATE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE."

<sup>71</sup> "Practising the Nations and National Identity: A Longitudinal Study of Independence Day in Israel - Ariely - 2025 - Nations and Nationalism - Wiley Online Library."

<sup>72</sup> Adi Sherzer, "The Sixth Scroll: The Ritualization of Israel's Declaration of Independence," *Nations and Nationalism* n/a, no. n/a (n.d.), <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.70035>.

<sup>73</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*.

<sup>74</sup> "From Jewish Renewal to Israeli Judaism," accessed June 10, 2026, <https://journals.openedition.org/assr/78964>.

This discontinuity becomes even clearer when Israel's position in international law is examined. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967 discusses Israel in the language of states, territories, war, withdrawal of armed forces, and regional peace.<sup>75</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948 discusses refugees, reconciliation, and political settlement after the 1948 war.<sup>76</sup> Neither document operates through the category of the Qur'anic Bani Israil. Both operate within the language of modern states and international law. Thus, even though modern Israel activates Jewish memory, its political actions and legal status must be analyzed as those of a modern state.

This distinction does not mean that ethical readings of modern Israel are impossible. The Qur'an can still provide a moral framework for evaluating justice, oppression, trust, covenantal violation, and collective responsibility. However, moral evaluation differs from historical identification. The verses about the Bani Israil may function as an ethical mirror across communities, but they should not be treated as proof that all actions of modern Israel are the direct continuation of the Qur'anic Bani Israil. In other words, the moral message of the Qur'an may remain relevant at the level of values, but it is not identical in terms of political object.

Moreover, symbolic continuity must not be understood as automatic justification for political claims. The fact that modern Israel uses Jewish names and symbols does not mean that all of its political claims are automatically legitimate. Conversely, the fact that modern Israel is a modern state does not mean that all of its symbolic relationships with Jewish tradition are false. In her study of Israeli national memory, Yael Zerubavel shows that collective memory in modern Israel is formed through selection, reorganization, and reinterpretation of the past. The table of contents of *Recovered Roots* indicates its focus on the relationship between history, collective memory, the Zionist reconstruction of the past, the birth of national myths, ritual, literature, education, and the politics of commemoration.<sup>77</sup> This supports the position of this article that Jewish memory in modern Israel is an active symbolic construction, not merely a passive inheritance.

This discussion has important implications for Qur'anic and tafsir studies. First, tafsir must distinguish Qur'anic terms from modern political categories. Second, historical analysis must recognize that Jewish identity underwent a long transformation before becoming a basis for a modern state. Third, contemporary analysis must treat modern Israel as a nation-state that activates Jewish memory, but is not directly identical with the Qur'anic Bani Israil. The framework of symbolic continuity and political discontinuity therefore enables a more proportional reading: neither anachronistic nor ahistorical.

Through this framework, the article avoids two forms of reduction. The first is theological-political reduction, which treats the Qur'anic verses about the Bani Israil as if they directly referred to modern Israel. The second is historical reduction, which erases the continuity of Jewish memory in the formation of modern Israel. A stronger academic middle position is to acknowledge that modern Israel uses Jewish symbolic resources, while also recognizing that these resources have been reworked within the logic of nationalism, state law, and modern geopolitics. Thus, the Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel are symbolically connected, but politically discontinuous. Such a reading enables

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<sup>75</sup> UN. Security Council (22nd year : 1967), ed., *Resolution 242 (1967)* (1968).

<sup>76</sup> "Palestine-Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator."

<sup>77</sup> Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1997).

the article to remain rooted in Qur'anic and tafsir studies while remaining attentive to Jewish history and the formation of the modern state.

This distinction is central to the analytical contribution of the article. It allows Qur'anic studies to engage contemporary political identity without forcing modern state categories into the Qur'anic text. It also allows identity studies to recognize the role of religious memory in modern nationalism without treating that memory as direct political legitimacy.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the relationship between Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel cannot be explained through direct identity, total separation, or simple historical continuity. Bani Israil in the Qur'an belongs to a revelatory and moral horizon, in which genealogy, prophecy, covenant, divine favor, and accountability are inseparably connected. Modern Israel, by contrast, belongs to the horizon of modern nationalism, state law, citizenship, sovereignty, and political institutions. The analytical problem, therefore, is not whether both categories are related or unrelated, but how their relationship should be conceptually mediated.

The framework of symbolic continuity and political discontinuity offers such mediation. Symbolic continuity explains how Jewish memory, names, language, land narratives, diaspora consciousness, and return motifs can persist across historical periods and be reactivated in modern national identity. Political discontinuity explains why this persistence does not make modern Israel identical with Qur'anic Bani Israil, because modern Israel operates through the institutional logic of the nation-state rather than the Qur'anic logic of revelation, covenant, and moral responsibility. In this sense, continuity exists at the level of memory and symbolism, while discontinuity appears at the level of political form, legal structure, and state authority.

The theoretical implication of this study is that Qur'anic communal categories should not be transferred directly into modern political categories without textual, historical, and conceptual mediation. This approach avoids two interpretive errors: anachronistically reading Qur'anic references to Bani Israil as direct references to modern Israel, and completely severing modern Israel from the Jewish symbolic tradition that it selectively reactivates. By distinguishing Qur'anic identity, Jewish memory, Zionist nationalism, and modern statehood, this study contributes to Qur'anic and tafsir studies by offering a more precise framework for discussing the relationship between scripture, historical identity, and modern political formation.

This study contributes by formulating symbolic continuity and political discontinuity as a theoretical framework for reading Qur'anic Bani Israil and modern Israel without anachronism. It advances Qur'anic hermeneutics by distinguishing Qur'anic communal categories from modern political labels, while contributing to identity and nationalism studies by showing how Jewish memory and symbols are transformed into modern national and legal-political forms. Further research may apply the framework of symbolic continuity and political discontinuity to the reception of Bani Israil verses in modern Indonesian tafsir and digital da'wah, examining how Qur'anic categories are interpreted, circulated, and sometimes politicized in contemporary Muslim discourse.

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