

Palestinian Soft Power Strategy: Tathrizun or Tatreez as a Legacy of Community Security

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Abstract: The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the most complex and protracted international conflicts in the world. In addition to involving political, security, and territorial aspects, these conflicts are also closely related to national identity, history, cultural heritage or community security. Under the conditions of limited hard power, Palestine uses cultural heritage as an instrument of soft power to gain international legitimacy and support. This study aims to analyze how Palestine uses cultural heritage as an instrument of soft power in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This research uses the theory of Soft Power put forward by Joseph S. Nye or can be through the intermediary of other literature reviews that we can call "other than Joseph S. Nye", and the concept of cultural diplomacy as the framework of analysis. The research method used is a qualitative method with a literature study approach through scientific journals, books, international organization reports, and UNESCO documents. The results of the study show that Palestinian cultural heritage not only serves as a symbol of national identity, but also becomes an effective instrument of diplomacy in building a positive image and gaining international support. Through the promotion of culture, the preservation of historical sites, and UNESCO's recognition of Palestine's cultural heritage, Palestine has been able to strengthen its political legitimacy at the global level. This research concludes that cultural heritage has a strategic role as an instrument of Palestinian soft power in facing Israel's political and military dominance.

Keywords: Soft Power; Cultural Heritage; Palestine; Cultural Diplomacy; UNESCO.

INTRODUCTION

The development of international relations studies shows that the strength of a country is no longer determined solely by military and economic capabilities. In the era of globalization, culture, values, and identity are important instruments that can be used to influence international public opinion. Joseph Nye calls this phenomenon soft power, that is, the ability to obtain desired results through attraction and persuasion rather than the use of military force or economic pressure (Cristo, t.t.)

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the conflicts that is not only related to territorial and security struggles, but also concerns identity, history, and culture. For decades, Palestinians have faced various challenges in fighting for their rights amid Israel's military and political dominance. The limited military capacity makes Palestine have to look for alternative strategies that are able to improve its bargaining position at the international level (Khalidi, 2020)

One of the strategies used is the use of cultural heritage as a soft power instrument. Palestinian cultural heritage includes historical sites, community traditions, languages, arts, traditional clothing, culinary, and various other forms of cultural expression that reflect the identity of the Palestinian nation. Culture is an important means of showing the existence of the Palestinian people to the international world while strengthening the historical legitimacy of the land they claim (Oedipus, t.t.).

In addition, the international recognition of the Palestinian cultural heritage through UNESCO provides a new dimension to the Palestinian diplomatic struggle. The various Palestinian cultural sites recognized as World Heritage not only have historical value, but also become symbols of international recognition of the identity and existence of the Palestinian nation (Centre, t.t.-b).

Problem Formulation

1. What is the role of cultural heritage in the formation of Palestinian national identity?
2. How does Palestine use cultural heritage as an instrument of soft power in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

3. Why is cultural heritage an effective instrument in gaining international legitimacy and support for Palestine?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Soft Power

In 1989 Joseph Nye popularized the term "soft power" to signify the power of attraction expressed through norms, values, services, and opportunities that appeal to others. Since then, the term has become common as a useful way to encapsulate all the material and non-material means that a country can have that positively influences (usually foreign) public opinion. What Nye doesn't do much is look at the mechanisms, both public and private (and often in combination), that are used to actually harness soft power in an international context. This is the realm of cultural diplomacy ((PDF) Cultural Diplomacy t.t.)

Joseph S. Nye defines soft power as the ability of an actor to influence the behavior of another party through cultural appeal, values, and political legitimacy without the use of military force or economic pressure (Soft Power and Great-Power Competition, t.t.). According to Nye, culture is one of the main sources of soft power because it is able to create interest and sympathy that can influence the attitude of the international community (Gomichon, t.t.).

Therefore, soft power is an important instrument in modern diplomacy, especially in the context of modern issues that require cross-border cooperation. In practice, soft power is not only owned by the state, but also by non-state actors. International organizations, epistemic communities, and the private sector have the capacity to shape discourse and influence the global agenda through the dissemination of values and ideas. This shows that soft power is not just a complementary tool, but has become a central element in non-traditional diplomacy (Putra, 2025)

In modern international relations, soft power is becoming an increasingly important instrument because it allows a country or actor to gain support through persuasion. Countries that have an attractive culture and widely accepted values tend to have a greater ability to influence international public opinion. Soft power can only be used if the other party recognizes the effort, has the same expectations in its implementation and strengthens the determination to achieve a common goal. In the midst of a free society, soft power does not apply to those who want to dominate power by imposing their influence by force (SOFT POWER DAN SOFT DIPLOMACY Yanyan Mochamad Yani & Elnovani Lusiana, t.t.).

As will become clear, although these various potential soft powers associated with "dark legacy" sites can be separated for classification and analysis purposes, they also interact with each other and, in an ideal scenario, become mutually supportive (Clarke dkk., 2017)

Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is the use of cultural elements as an instrument of international relations to increase understanding, build a positive image, and strengthen relations between nations ((45) A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy, t.t.). Cultural diplomacy is carried out through the promotion of art, language, tradition, education, and cultural heritage. Also available in (SOFT POWER DAN SOFT DIPLOMACY Yanyan Mochamad Yani & Elnovani Lusiana, t.t.) explained, that soft power according to Nye2 (2008) consists of elements of culture, value systems and policies.

Heritage as a mirror of soft power emerges as a symbol that uncovers ethos, actors, entities and manifestations: the boundaries of preservation and dialogue. This expansive metaphor, full of meaning, represents a new field that international relations has recently entered: the legacy path as a soft power. At its core, soft power is a relative, intangible concept that is inherently difficult to measure. The relational character of soft forces gives rise to a fairly complex level of comparison, in which transnational comparisons become complicated and difficult. Slightly correct pronunciation: what is liked in one country may be hated in another (Christofolletti, 2023)

According to (Cull, 2008) cultural diplomacy has the ability to reach the international community more broadly than conventional political diplomacy. Therefore, many countries use culture as an instrument to strengthen their influence and image in the international world.

On both a conceptual and empirical level, there is a clear overlap between cultural diplomacy and legacy diplomacy. For Cull, cultural diplomacy is an effort 'to manage the international environment

through introducing its (the country's) cultural resources and achievements abroad and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad. The brief definition, however, covers the ongoing debate surrounding the origins of the term and the benefits of maintaining or removing a variety of boundaries, including the boundaries between public and culture, state and non-state, propaganda and information, and the extent to which culture can be separated from socio-politics (Winter, 2015)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Palestinian Cultural Heritage as a National Identity

Cultural heritage has an important role in the formation of Palestinian national identity. Various forms of culture such as traditional Dabke dance, traditional Tatreez embroidery, Palestinian cuisine, Palestinian Arabic, and historical sites have become symbols of the existence of the Palestinian nation (Oedipus, t.t.).

In protracted conflict situations, cultural heritage serves as a tool to maintain national identity. Culture allows the Palestinian people to maintain a collective memory and strengthen a sense of nationality in the midst of the various political and social pressures they face (Khalidi, 2020)

Moreover, Palestinian national identity is shaped not only by political experience, but also by the shared memory of historical events that are passed down from generation to generation. The memory of the 1948 Nakba, the loss of land, the displacement of the population, and the experience of living in the refugee camps continues to be reproduced through various cultural expressions, oral traditions, arts, and social practices of the Palestinian people. Through this process, culture serves as a means to maintain the continuity of the national narrative that unites the Palestinian people even though they live in geographically separated conditions. Thus, cultural heritage becomes an important foundation in the formation and maintenance of contemporary Palestinian national identity (Yaling, 2021)



Tatreez, for example, is new and has been recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2021. The recognition shows that Palestinian culture has universal value that is recognized by the international community and strengthens the Palestinian national identity in the midst of the ongoing conflict (Palestinian Embroidery Registered on UNESCO Cultural Heritage List, t.t.).

In a more specific context, Tatreez not only represents traditional embroidery art, but also serves as a medium that stores and transmits Palestinian cultural memory. The various motifs used in Tatreez contain stories about regional origins, family experiences, and collective memories of Palestinian life before the mass displacement. As the Palestinian diaspora grew, Tatreez's practice underwent a transformation into a means to maintain cultural identity while affirming the existence of the Palestinian nation in the international public sphere. Therefore, Tatreez can be understood as a form of articulation of national identity that connects the memory of the past with the struggle of the Palestinian people in the present (Sheets, 2024)

Tatreez also made a significant contribution to maintaining the sustainability of Palestinian cultural identity amid various social and political opposition. Through these various motifs and patterns that are inherited from generation to generation, Tatreez also functions as a medium that is one of the faces of the history, values, and characteristics of Palestinian people from various regions. For example: Indonesia has batik. Meanwhile, Palestine has Tatreez or Tathrizun with its embroidery that is so special. The existence of Tatreez not only preserves traditional cultural heritage, but also strengthens public awareness of the importance of preserving national identity. Therefore, Tathrizun becomes one of the cultural continuities as well as introducing the heritage of grandmothers, mothers, then to their daughters, and grandchildren in the future, of course to the international community (خليل, 2023)

In addition to playing a role in cultural preservation, Tathrizun also provides real social and economic benefits for the Palestinian community, especially women. In various diaspora communities as well as local Palestinian communities, Tatreez embroidery has developed into a means of economic empowerment that helps increase family income while maintaining cultural traditions. On the other hand, the involvement of women in the production and distribution of Tatreez products has strengthened social solidarity and expanded the spread of Palestinian cultural identity to the global level. Thus, Tatreez not only serves as a cultural symbol, but also as a social asset that supports the resilience of the Palestinian community in the face of various social and political changes (Pouillard & Dubé-Sénécal, 2023)

Palestinian Soft Power Strategy through Cultural Heritage

Palestine uses cultural heritage as an instrument of soft power through various cultural promotion activities at the international level. Art festivals, cultural exhibitions, music performances, photography exhibitions, and the promotion of Palestinian cuisine are a means to introduce Palestinian identity to the world community.

In addition, Palestine also uses social media as an instrument of cultural diplomacy. Various digital campaigns featuring the history, culture, and life of the Palestinian people have managed to attract the attention of the international community, especially the younger generation. Through this strategy, Palestine seeks to build a positive image and gain global sympathy (Cristo, t.t.)

The Palestinian soft power strategy through cultural heritage is also carried out by utilizing the Palestinian diaspora network spread across various countries. The diaspora community plays an active role in organizing art exhibitions, cultural festivals, film screenings such as one of the films for introduction, namely Farchah. The actors also wear Tatreez especially women. There they also tried to introduce the history and identity of Palestine to the international community. Through these activities, Palestinian culture is not only maintained as a community heritage, but also promoted as a means to build global understanding and solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people. Thus, the diaspora is one of the struggles of the Palestinian people. Thus, the diaspora has become one of the important actors in expanding the reach of Palestinian cultural diplomacy at the international level (Khan dkk., 2007)

Through this approach, Palestine seeks to build a cultural appeal that is able to influence international public perception more effectively than a formal political approach alone. Culture is a medium of communication that allows the international community to understand the social reality of Palestine through the perspective of humanity and the daily experiences of its people (Swedenburg, 2003)

Furthermore, the development of digital technology has strengthened the effectiveness of the Palestinian soft power strategy through cultural heritage. The digital platform allows a wide range of Palestinian cultural symbols, including Tatreez, traditional music, visual artworks, and other local traditions, to be known to a global audience without geographical boundaries. The presence of digital media also makes it easier for the Palestinian cultural community to build international networks, share information, and gather support from the world community. Therefore, the use of digital technology has become an important part of Palestinian efforts to increase cultural visibility and expand their soft power influence at the international level (Aouragh, 2011)



The success of Palestine in utilizing cultural heritage as an instrument of soft power shows that influence in international relations is not always determined by military capacity or economic power. In conditions of limited political and material resources, culture is an alternative that allows Palestine to remain present in the global conversation and maintain its existence in the midst of international political dynamics. Through various practices of cultural diplomacy, the international community is not only

introduced to aspects of Palestinian art and tradition, but also to the social, historical, and aspiring realities of the Palestinian nation itself. Thus, cultural heritage acts as a means of connecting Palestinian national interests with the attention of the global community, thereby expanding the space of international support that can be used in the Palestinian political and diplomatic struggle (Hammer, 2009)

The Effectiveness of Cultural Heritage in Gaining International Support

Cultural heritage has proven to be an effective instrument in increasing international legitimacy and support for Palestine. One of the indicators is the success of Palestine in obtaining UNESCO recognition of various cultural and historical sites located in the Palestinian territory.

In 2012, UNESCO recognized the Birthplace of Jesus: Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route in Bethlehem as a World Heritage Site. Then in 2017, Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town was also included in the UNESCO World Heritage List (Centre, t.t.-a)

The recognition provides important symbolic legitimacy for Palestine because it shows that the international community recognizes the existence and historical value of Palestinian culture. This recognition also strengthens the position of Palestine in various international forums (Ashworth dkk., 2007)

As a result, apart from UNESCO, the promotion of Palestinian culture has increased the global community's awareness of the identity and struggle of the Palestinian nation. Various cultural campaigns have succeeded in building international solidarity and encouraging support from various civil society groups in various countries.

The effectiveness of Palestinian cultural heritage in gaining international support can also be seen from its ability to build global public engagement on the Palestinian issue. Various forms of cultural expression such as visual arts, intangible culture enable Palestinian society through a more humanist and humane approach. Such cultural approaches tend to be more readily accepted by the international public, as they are not always portrayed as part of formal political debates. As a result, cultural heritage is able to open a space for dialogue that encourages the world's increasing attention to the social and historical conditions of Palestine (Sabbagh-Khoury 2023).

Civil society organizations, academic communities, cultural institutions, and international advocacy groups often use cultural activities as a medium to build cooperation and raise global awareness of the Palestinian issue. Through this network, cultural heritage not only serves as a symbol of national identity, but also as a means of bringing together various international actors in an effort to support the preservation of the culture and rights of the Palestinian people. Thus, culture plays a role as a medium that strengthens the relationship between the Palestinian people and the global community (Peteet, 2005)

A little further, the effectiveness of cultural heritage in gaining international support shows that culture has the capacity to shape the perceptions and preferences of international actors. When Palestinian cultural symbols are introduced through exhibitions, festivals, and various global communication platforms, the international community gains a broader understanding of Palestinian identity and history. This condition contributes to the formation of international sympathy that can ultimately support the position of Palestine in various global platforms. Therefore, cultural heritage is not only an asset for the preservation of national identity, but also a strategic resource that strengthens international support for Palestine (Daher, 2021)



Challenges and Limitations of the Palestinian Soft Power Strategy through Cultural Heritage

Although soft power is often seen as an effective instrument in building international influence through cultural appeal, values, and identity, its implementation does not always go unimpeded. The success of a soft power strategy depends heavily on an actor's ability to build a narrative that is engaging, relevant, and able to reach a wide international audience. In the era of globalization and digitalization, competition for international public attention is increasing as various countries and non-state actors seek to promote their respective identities and interests. This condition causes cultural attraction not to automatically generate international influence if it is not supported by an effective and sustainable communication strategy. In other words, soft power does not only depend on the ownership of cultural resources, but also on the ability to manage and disseminate these narratives to the global community (Wondal & Angelin, 2026)

In addition, the effectiveness of soft power is also influenced by structural factors such as institutional support, infrastructure quality, civil society participation, and consistency in building an international image. Research shows that successful soft power strategies are generally supported by collaboration between governments, communities, and the creative sector in promoting cultural identity in a sustainable manner. Conversely, limited resources, weak institutional support, and the inability to sustain a long-term narrative can reduce the effectiveness of such strategies. Therefore, soft power needs to be understood as a process that requires long-term investment and the support of various actors in order to be able to generate lasting influence in a competitive international environment (Wondal & Angelin, 2026)

Another challenge in the implementation of soft power arises from changes in the global communication environment which are increasingly influenced by the development of digital technology. Although digital media is able to significantly expand the reach of cultural diplomacy, its use also presents various risks such as disinformation, cultural stereotypes, and politicization of identities that can hinder the acceptance of cultural messages by the international community. In addition, the gap in access to technology and digital capabilities between actors can also affect the effectiveness of the dissemination of cultural narratives in the global space. Therefore, the success of a soft power strategy is not only determined by its cultural appeal, but also by the ability to manage communication challenges that arise in the digital era (Uyun, t.t.).

Another challenge that Palestinians face in utilizing cultural heritage as an instrument of soft power relates to the conditions of social fragmentation and the diaspora experience experienced by the Palestinian people over the decades. The situation of displacement, population displacement, and the separation of the Palestinian community in various regions have caused the process of cultural preservation and heritage to face various obstacles. In these conditions, efforts to maintain collective memory, national identity, and cultural heritage are becoming increasingly important and increasingly difficult to do. Butler explained that the Palestinian people continue to seek to reconstruct their historical identity and memory through various forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in response to the threat of historical erasure and representation of Palestinian identity. This condition shows that the effectiveness of cultural heritage as a source of Palestinian soft power is not only determined by its cultural appeal, but also by the ability of the Palestinian people to maintain the sustainability of their cultural memory and identity in the midst of various social and political challenges (Butler, 2009)

The challenge of utilizing Palestinian cultural heritage as an instrument of soft power is also related to the condition of heritage preservation which still faces various structural obstacles. Amiry and Bshara explained that Palestinian cultural heritage is in a vulnerable situation due to weak institutional protection, limited conservation resources, and suboptimal public and government awareness of the importance of heritage preservation. In addition, uncontrolled urban development, destruction of historical sites, and various pressures arising from prolonged conflict also increase the risk of loss of cultural assets that are part of Palestinian national identity. This condition shows that the Palestinian cultural heritage not only faces challenges in the process of international promotion, but also in efforts to maintain its existence in a sustainable manner (Barakat, 2007)

Furthermore, various threats to cultural heritage indirectly affect the effectiveness of the Palestinian soft power strategy. Cultural heritage is one of the main sources that Palestine uses to introduce its national identity, history, and existence to the international community. However, when cultural sites,

historical memory, and various forms of cultural heritage face the risk of damage or limited preservation, their ability to function as an instrument of diplomacy and international image-building is also limited. Therefore, the success of the Palestinian soft power strategy does not only depend on its cultural attractiveness, but also on the ability to maintain, protect, and preserve this cultural heritage in the midst of various ongoing political, social, and institutional challenges (Barakat, 2007)

Therefore, Al-Houdalieh and Sauders emphasized the importance of strengthening regulations, documentation, and supervision of areas that have historical and archaeological value. These steps are necessary so that the process of making, duplicating, and in the form of buildings, it means that development can go hand in hand with efforts to preserve the existence of cultural heritage which is an important part of the history and collective memory of the Palestinian people (al-Houdalieh & Sauders, 2009)

CONCLUSION

Cultural heritage has an important role in the formation of Palestinian national identity and is one of the main symbols of the existence of the Palestinian nation. In situations of prolonged conflict with Israel, culture serves not only as a historical heritage, but also as an instrument of politics and diplomacy. Palestine uses cultural heritage as an instrument of soft power through cultural promotion, cultural diplomacy, social media, and cooperation with various international organizations. The strategy allowed the Palestinians to build a positive image and gain the sympathy of the international community. UNESCO's recognition of Palestine's cultural heritage shows that culture can be an effective instrument in gaining international legitimacy and support. Therefore, cultural heritage can be considered as one of the sources of Palestinian strategic strength in facing political and security challenges in the midst of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Although the concept of soft power still has limitations and there are really a lot of challenges that must be faced in today's era (Post-Truth). That is the concept of soft power that does not force the will of an actor or a state. Weapons are effective in shaping peace, tranquility, and love through cultural heritages that exist from various internals, which exist in their respective countries. Simply put, soft power invites softly, while hard power invites but by force or through a ceasefire. The soft meaning used by soft power is through diplomacy. Whether it's cultural diplomacy, culinary diplomacy, language diplomacy, digital diplomacy, or art diplomacy (dance, music, weaving, embroidery of ancient models (Tathreez or Tathrizun) and so on). Finally, from here we can understand a little more and be literate about the existence of cultural heritage and how we implement it to the world. We as the next generation of the post-truth era have easier access to whatever we want and it should be important to remind each other, especially in introducing the cultural heritage of the past and the heritage of the community. Soft power gives us a little enlightenment that something we want is not always just by violence in any form.

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