



## Decolonizing Cultural Heritage Theory: A Critical Reframing from the Palestinian Context

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# Decolonizing Cultural Heritage Theory: A Critical Reframing from the Palestinian Context

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## Abstract

This study examines how heritage conservation theories remain grounded in Eurocentric frameworks shaped by colonial and post-war Europe, including the Venice Charter, the Nara Document on Authenticity, and UNESCO conventions. While these agreements advanced global heritage discourse, they continue to marginalize indigenous, Islamic, and non-Western perspectives, particularly those impacted by conflict. Applying decolonial theory, the research reframes heritage paradigms by proposing a Palestinian philosophy rooted in local knowledge, community memory, and resistance practices. Central to this approach is the concept of “Liberation Heritage,” an anti-colonial model of cultural survival developed through literature, judicial texts, religious traditions such as Waqf, and heritage storytelling. This framework challenges Western notions of authenticity by emphasizing contextual values like living traditions, symbolic continuity, and cultural stewardship under occupation. Gaza, with its rich history and resilience amid suffering, serves as a primary case study for articulating this theory. Drawing on postcolonial thought, critical heritage studies, and Islamic architectural principles, the paper offers a constructive alternative for colonized or conflict-affected communities reclaiming cultural narratives. The findings contribute to broadening heritage theory, diversifying conservation practices, and empowering communities to assert their cultural sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Heritage as Resistance; Liberation Heritage; Digital Media; Palestinian Heritage; Cultural Survival; Decolonial Theory; Multimodal Discourse

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Language,  
Technology,  
and Social Media



## INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage has traditionally been regarded as the preservation of material objects, monuments, and architectural sites. However, contemporary critiques of heritage conservation frameworks, particularly those rooted in Western, Eurocentric paradigms, emphasize that these frameworks marginalize the epistemologies and practices of communities outside the Global North. In regions such as Palestine, heritage cannot be merely reduced to objects or sites; instead, it serves as a dynamic, living process linked to identity, memory, and resistance. In Gaza, for instance, heritage practices are not passive acts of preservation, but are central to survival and political resistance against occupation and violence [1], [2], [3]. The notion of heritage as resistance has been explored by scholars such as Banda et al. [4] and Apaydin [5], who discuss how heritage practices in conflict zones are intertwined with national and cultural survival.

Recent advancements in critical heritage studies and decolonial theory have expanded the conversation by recognizing the agency of local communities in shaping their own heritage narratives. This shift challenges the universality of Western conservation frameworks, proposing that heritage is a dynamic practice grounded in community memory, ethical responsibility, and contextual significance. Palestinian heritage, particularly in Gaza, exemplifies this shift. Here, heritage is maintained not merely for aesthetic or historical reasons, but as a form of cultural affirmation and resistance. Practices such as oral storytelling, community rebuilding, agricultural traditions, and religious endowments serve as living symbols of resilience and continuity, contrary to colonial narratives that seek to erase them [6], [7]. This line of thought aligns with James-Williamson et al. [8], where they argues that cultural survival is maintained through both tangible and intangible heritage practices, which defy attempts of colonial erasure.

While much of the discourse surrounding decolonizing heritage has focused on material preservation and the recovery of tangible assets, the role of digital technologies and social media in this process has become increasingly significant. Digital media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, along with emerging technologies like augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), offer new pathways for heritage preservation. These technologies enable communities in conflict zones, like Gaza, to assert their cultural identities, share stories of resistance, and document intangible cultural heritage that may otherwise be erased by external forces. Digital media also allows for the reclamation of narrative ownership, a concept discussed in Chun [9] notion of "ethnoscapes", where global flows of media empower local communities to articulate their own identities and histories in opposition to dominant cultural narratives [10], [11].

These digital heritage practices are in essence bound up with language use, requiring specific registers (testimonial, memorial, activist, or educational registers) or specific modes of language combination (image/video + caption + hashtag + comment threads) or language shift (Arabic-English code-switching or variation between dialects and standard language). The features, such as tagging, remixing, and recommendations, that are unique to digital environments shape content that emerges as "heritage" within diasporic circuits. Therefore, as a discourse, this paper examines how social media, apart from being a channel for the distribution of heritage content, is a linguistic environment where meaning related to heritage is constantly refigured in real-time interactions.

This study introduces the concept of Liberation Heritage, a decolonial framework that redefines heritage as a living, dynamic resource integral to cultural survival and political resistance. Rather than focusing on static materiality, Liberation Heritage emphasizes the importance of

memory, ritual, and community agency. This theoretical model is drawn from the Palestinian experience, particularly in Gaza, where heritage serves as both a tool of resistance and a means of asserting cultural sovereignty. Liberation Heritage challenges the dominant narratives on heritage conservation, proposing instead a framework where heritage is rooted in local knowledge systems, oral traditions, and community memory, as seen in Gentry and Smith [12] work on "critical heritage studies", which critiques the neoliberal appropriation of heritage for market-driven tourism while arguing for a more inclusive, community-centered approach.

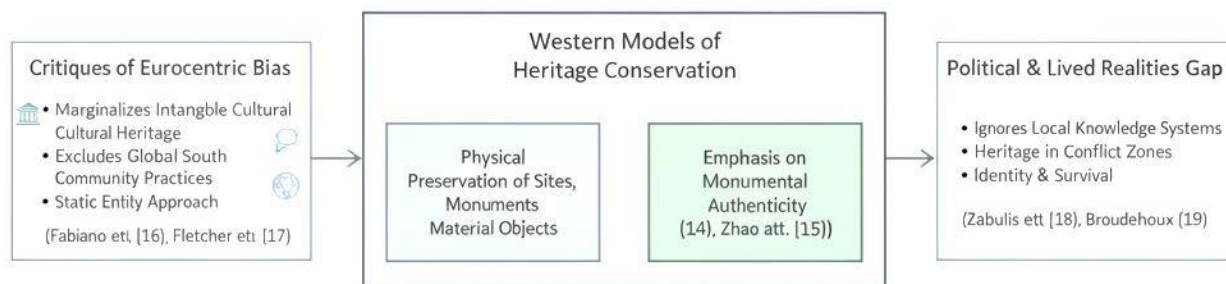
The study further explores the role of digital technologies in reimagining heritage conservation within this framework, highlighting how digital tools can preserve and transmit Palestinian cultural identity across borders and time. This inclusion of digital platforms aligns with the argument made by So [13] on the "network society", where the proliferation of digital technologies has empowered local communities, particularly in oppressed regions, to actively shape and share their cultural heritage in ways that resist historical erasure. Through the lens of Liberation Heritage, this study investigates how Palestinian communities, with the help of digital media, resist cultural erasure and reclaim their heritage. Additionally, the study explores how this framework can inform global heritage practices, proposing a decolonial shift that centers on community-led stewardship, local knowledge, and the ethical dimensions of heritage preservation. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on heritage conservation by advocating for a justice-oriented model that acknowledges the lived realities of colonized and conflict-affected communities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Traditional Heritage Conservation Frameworks*

Heritage conservation has traditionally been framed around the preservation of material objects, monuments, and architectural sites. Western models of heritage conservation, such as those outlined in the Shehata [14] and Zhao et al. [15], have predominantly emphasized the physical preservation of sites, often privileging monumental authenticity over other forms of cultural heritage. These frameworks have been foundational but are increasingly criticized for their Eurocentric bias, which marginalizes intangible cultural heritage and the practices of communities in the Global South.

Fabiano et al. [16] and Fletcher et al. [17] critiques these frameworks for being largely shaped by the concerns of post-industrial societies, often ignoring the lived realities and local knowledge systems of indigenous and non-Western communities. This critique highlights a significant gap in the existing models, where heritage is not seen as a dynamic, community-driven practice but rather as a static entity to be preserved. Zabulis et al. [18] and Broudehoux [19] also argue that such models often fail to address the political implications of heritage conservation, particularly in conflict zones where heritage is directly tied to identity and survival.



**Figure 1.** Community-Led Heritage Preservation Practices

### *Decolonizing Heritage: Emergence of Community-Centered Approaches*

In response to the limitations of Western frameworks, decolonial theory has become an essential lens in heritage studies. Decolonial approaches emphasize the importance of including local knowledge systems, oral traditions, and community memory as integral aspects of heritage conservation. Critical heritage studies, as articulated by Hara et al. [20] and Rossitti et al. [21], underscore that heritage is not simply a passive, historical object to be preserved, but a living, evolving process intertwined with social and political struggles. These approaches argue that heritage must be viewed through the lens of community agency, resilience, and political resistance. In regions under occupation or conflict, such as Palestine, the importance of cultural survival through heritage practices becomes particularly evident. De Cesari [22], Hammami [23], and Saeedi et al. [24] explores how Palestinian communities use heritage not only as a means of preserving their past but as an active tool of resistance against colonial oppression. Palestinian heritage practices, including oral storytelling, community rebuilding, and religious endowments, are acts of resilience that help maintain cultural identity in the face of systemic violence and cultural erasure.

### *Heritage as Resistance: The Case of Palestine*

In Palestine, heritage is not simply about preserving physical artifacts or monuments. Instead, heritage becomes deeply connected to collective memory and political identity. Hanagan and Tilly [25] argues that Palestinian heritage practices, particularly in Gaza, are intrinsically linked to resistance movements, with cultural acts such as rebuilding destroyed mosques and cultivating traditional agricultural practices being symbolic acts of defiance against colonial forces. Heritage is maintained as a form of affirmation, where the preservation of sites and traditions is a form of cultural survival against forces of destruction. This shift in understanding heritage as an active form of resistance challenges traditional Western models that view heritage primarily through a materialistic, static lens. Heritage in Gaza, for instance, is sustained through practices that may not be visible in conventional conservation terms but are integral to the social fabric of the community. These practices defy external attempts to erase Palestinian identity by transforming heritage into an act of political resistance [26], [27], [28].

### *Digital Media and Heritage Preservation in Conflict Zones*

The role of digital technologies in heritage preservation has become increasingly significant in recent years, especially in conflict-affected regions like Gaza, where physical access to heritage sites is often restricted. Digital media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as technologies like AR and VR, have opened up new avenues for documenting and sharing

cultural heritage [29], [30], [31]. These digital tools allow marginalized communities to assert their cultural identities, resist cultural erasure, and share their heritage globally. Goel [32] discusses the emergence of the network society, where digital technologies enable global cultural flows that allow local communities to participate in the global discourse on heritage. Digital media platforms empower Palestinian communities to bypass traditional gatekeepers of heritage and control how their heritage is represented. This digital empowerment allows Palestinian communities to document their struggles and cultural resilience in real-time, creating spaces for collective memory and cultural affirmation in the face of oppression [33], [34].

Moreover, Valler et al. [35] introduces the concept of ethnoscaapes, which highlights how local cultural practices and heritage are increasingly shaped by global media flows. Palestinian digital heritage practices, particularly on social media, are examples of how heritage can be reclaimed and reshaped in the digital era. These platforms provide a space for Palestinian communities to share their heritage in ways that resist colonial narratives and assert their identity on their own terms.

### *Liberation Heritage: A Decolonial Framework*

The concept of Liberation Heritage is introduced as a decolonial alternative to traditional heritage conservation models. Liberation Heritage redefines heritage as a dynamic, community-driven resource for cultural survival and resistance. Rather than focusing solely on the material preservation of heritage, Liberation Heritage emphasizes the importance of community agency, oral traditions, and memory practices in preserving and transmitting heritage [4], [36]. This framework challenges the universality of Western conservation standards and proposes that the value of heritage is inherently tied to its cultural, social, and political context.

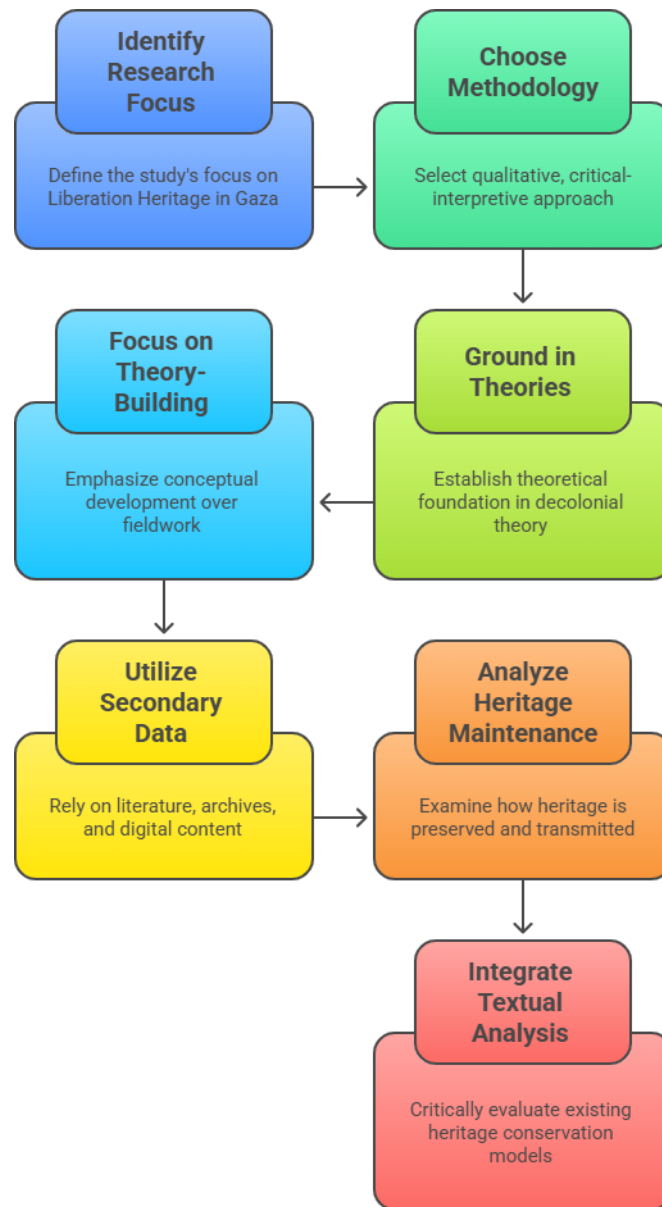
In this framework, Palestinian heritage serves as a model for understanding how communities under occupation can reclaim their cultural sovereignty through active engagement with their heritage. The role of community-led conservation practices whether through the rebuilding of destroyed sites, oral histories, or grassroots cultural initiatives becomes central to the preservation of cultural identity and resistance to cultural erasure. The application of this framework extends beyond Palestine, providing insights into how other marginalized or colonized communities can use their heritage to assert sovereignty and resist cultural genocide [1], [37], [38].

## **METHODS**

### *Research Design*

This study adopts a qualitative, critical-interpretive methodology, grounded in decolonial theory and critical heritage studies. The focus is on theory-building rather than empirical fieldwork due to the constraints imposed by the ongoing conflict and occupation in Gaza. The aim is to conceptualize and critically engage with the idea of Liberation Heritage and explore its application within the Palestinian context, particularly in Gaza. The methodology centers on the decolonial praxis of reclaiming cultural narratives, which allows marginalized communities, such as Palestinians, to assert their own heritage and resist external hegemonic interpretations. Given the challenges of on site research in conflict zones, this study relies heavily on secondary data, drawing on literature, archival documents, and digital content (such as oral histories and social media posts) to examine how Palestinian heritage is maintained and transmitted through community practices and digital platforms. The research design also integrates textual analysis to critically evaluate the theories and

models of heritage conservation in the existing literature, with a focus on how these models apply or fail to apply to the Palestinian experience.



**Figure 2.** Digital Media Platforms for Heritage Reclamation

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Data for this study was gathered through multiple secondary sources, which were critical in understanding how Palestinian heritage is preserved in the context of ongoing occupation and conflict. The data collection process aimed to encompass both traditional and digital methods of heritage preservation, highlighting the use of modern technologies by Palestinian communities to document and share their cultural practices. These sources include archival documents, oral histories, social media content, and scholarly literature. The integration of these varied data sources provides a comprehensive view of how heritage is actively maintained and transmitted, particularly in an environment where traditional preservation methods may be constrained. The primary sources of data for this study are outlined below:

**Table 1.** Overview of Data Sources

Source of Data	Description
Archival Documents	Historical and legal records related to Palestinian heritage sites, international heritage conventions (e.g., UNESCO), and documents reflecting efforts to preserve or restore cultural sites affected by conflict.
Oral Histories	Interviews and personal narratives from Palestinians who have actively participated in heritage preservation or have experienced the destruction of cultural sites, offering firsthand accounts of their efforts.
Social Media Content	Posts and videos shared on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, where Palestinian communities document and share their cultural heritage, particularly in the context of resistance and survival.
Scholarly Literature	Books, journal articles, and papers discussing theories of heritage conservation, decolonization, and case studies on heritage preservation in conflict zones and under occupation.

These data sources were chosen to provide a well-rounded understanding of how Palestinian heritage is preserved in both physical and digital realms. The inclusion of social media content is particularly significant, as it highlights how modern technology and digital platforms are increasingly used by Palestinian communities to document, preserve, and share their heritage. In contrast to traditional heritage conservation models that focus primarily on physical objects and sites, digital platforms allow communities to assert control over their cultural narratives and counteract the forces of cultural erasure and colonialism. By drawing on oral histories, the study also seeks to capture the personal and communal experiences of Palestinians involved in heritage preservation, particularly in contexts where direct access to heritage sites may be limited due to the ongoing conflict. These stories provide a rich, qualitative data set that illuminates the ways in which heritage is actively maintained and adapted in response to the challenges of occupation.

The archival documents and scholarly literature serve to frame this study within the broader context of heritage conservation theory and practice. These resources offer critical insights into the limitations of traditional conservation frameworks and the need for a more inclusive, community-centered approach to heritage preservation. Additionally, they provide historical and legal context that is essential for understanding the geopolitical challenges Palestinians face in preserving their cultural heritage. By combining these diverse data sources, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how Palestinian communities engage with their heritage, using both traditional and innovative methods to preserve cultural identity and resist cultural erasure.

### *Analytical Approach*

This study employs a qualitative, thematic analysis approach, grounded in decolonial theory and critical heritage studies, to analyze data collected from oral histories, social media content, and archival documents. The primary aim of this analysis is to understand how Palestinian communities preserve and transmit their heritage amidst occupation, with a particular focus on the role of digital media in this process. The analysis will identify recurring themes of heritage as resistance, cultural survival, and community agency. The analysis follows these key steps:

**Table 2.** Analytical Steps Overview

<b>Step</b>	<b>Description</b>
Thematic Coding	Identification and categorization of themes related to heritage preservation, community resilience, and the role of digital media in Palestinian cultural practices. Data from oral histories and social media content will be coded for recurring themes.
Critical Analysis of Heritage Models	A critique of Western-centric heritage conservation models using decolonial theory. This step examines how these models overlook intangible heritage and community agency, which are vital to the preservation of Palestinian culture.
Development of the Liberation Heritage Framework	Creation of a new framework, Liberation Heritage, which redefines heritage as a living, dynamic resource for cultural survival and political resistance. This framework emphasizes community-led preservation and the role of digital media.
Comparative Analysis	A comparison of Palestinian heritage practices with other conflict-affected or colonized regions. This highlights shared strategies of heritage reclamation and resistance, and assesses the potential application of the Liberation Heritage framework globally.

Table 2 summarizes the key steps in the analytical process, outlining how the study will systematically examine the data to develop and validate the Liberation Heritage framework. The thematic coding will identify the main themes that emerge from oral histories and social media content, while the critical analysis of existing heritage conservation models will highlight the limitations of traditional Western approaches. The creation of the Liberation Heritage framework follows from this critique, offering a new theoretical model that incorporates digital media and community-driven preservation. Finally, the comparative analysis situates Palestinian heritage within the broader context of global heritage resistance, assessing the wider applicability of the proposed framework.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

As this study relies on secondary data, including oral histories and social media content, ethical considerations are paramount. All data collected from public platforms are analyzed with respect to privacy and consent, especially concerning oral history sources. Participants' identities are anonymized, and any direct quotations are used with permission when applicable. The study adheres to ethical guidelines for working with oral traditions and digital content, ensuring that the narratives shared reflect the agency and consent of the communities involved. The research also respects the ethical responsibility embedded in the Liberation Heritage model, which emphasizes the importance of community-led stewardship and the preservation of cultural practices in ways that respect local knowledge systems and maintain the dignity of the communities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

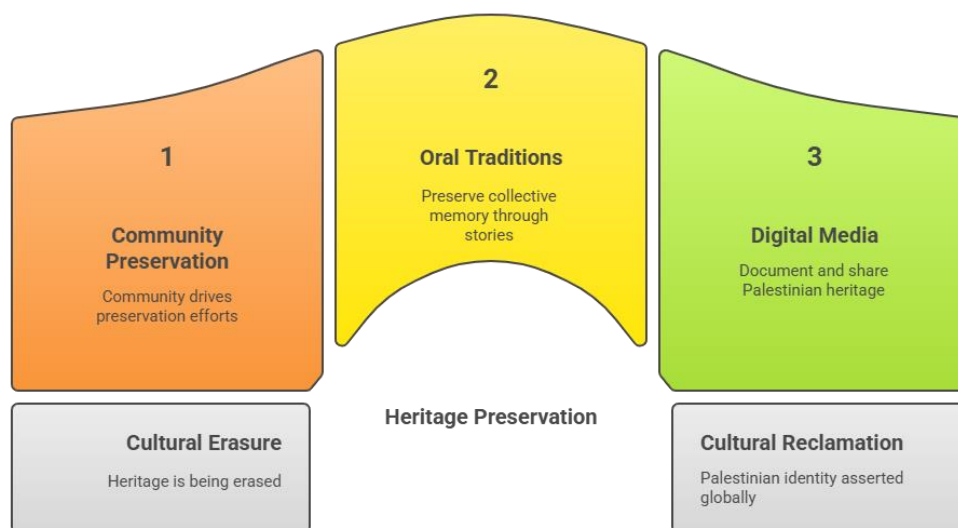
### *Thematic Coding of Oral Histories and Social Media Content*

The thematic coding of the oral histories and social media content revealed several key themes that illustrate how Palestinians engage with their heritage under occupation. These themes emphasize heritage as resistance, cultural survival, and community agency. Palestinians use oral traditions and digital platforms as tools of resistance and identity preservation. The use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube is crucial in countering cultural erasure and asserting Palestinian identity on a global scale. These findings align with research by Khawam and Jigyasu [39], who highlights the role of heritage as resistance in conflict zones, and Foroughi et al. [40], who discusses the role of global media flows in shaping local heritage practices.

**Table 3.** Key Themes from Oral Histories and Social Media Content

Theme	Description
Heritage as Resistance	This theme encompasses how Palestinians use heritage practices as a form of resistance against cultural erasure, emphasizing the role of community-driven preservation efforts [41], [42], [43].
Cultural Survival through Memory	The role of oral traditions in preserving collective memory, including stories of resilience and defiance that reflect the cultural survival of Palestinian identity [44], [45].
Digital Media as a Platform for Cultural Reclamation	Analysis of how social media platforms, such as Instagram and YouTube, are used to document and share Palestinian heritage, countering colonial narratives and asserting Palestinian identity globally [46], [47], [48].

Table 3 presents the key themes identified through the thematic coding of oral histories and social media content. The results reveal that Palestinians utilize both traditional and digital forms of heritage preservation as acts of cultural resistance. Social media platforms serve as critical tools in this resistance, enabling Palestinians to reclaim their heritage and assert their cultural identity in a global digital space.



**Figure 3.** Key Themes in Palestinian Heritage Preservation

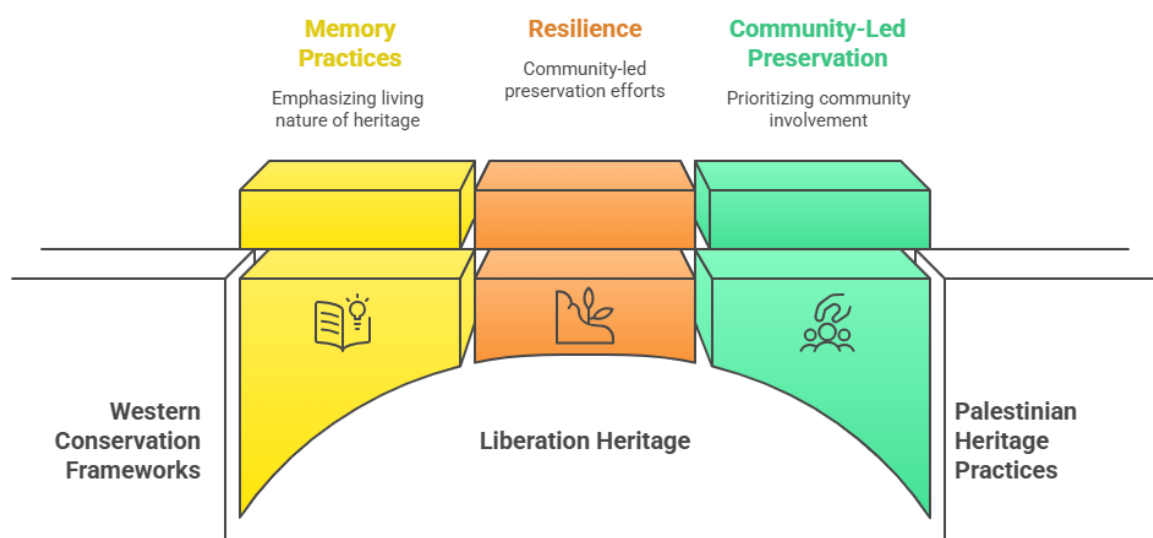
### Critical Analysis of Heritage Models

The results of the critical analysis of traditional Western heritage conservation models highlight the limitations of these models when applied to the Palestinian context. Western conservation frameworks, which focus primarily on material preservation, fail to accommodate the intangible heritage and community-driven preservation efforts that are essential in the Palestinian context [49]. Selamink et al. [50] and Usmaedi et al. [51] have often been criticized for neglecting local knowledge systems and non-material forms of heritage such as oral traditions and rituals. In contrast, the Liberation Heritage framework, which emphasizes memory practices, community agency, and the role of digital media in preserving heritage, offers a more relevant and flexible model for the Palestinian context [52], [53].

**Table 4.** Comparison of Traditional Heritage Conservation Models and Palestinian Heritage Practices

Model	Applicability to Palestinian Heritage
Western Conservation Frameworks	These models prioritize physical monuments and sites, often neglecting intangible aspects of heritage such as oral histories and community rituals [54], [55].
Liberation Heritage	A decolonial approach that emphasizes the living nature of heritage through memory practices, resilience, and community-led preservation [1], [56].

Table 4 compares traditional Western heritage conservation models with the Liberation Heritage framework. The comparison reveals that traditional models, which focus primarily on physical preservation, fail to capture the intangible and community-driven aspects of Palestinian heritage. In contrast, Liberation Heritage offers a more relevant and flexible model, aligning with the dynamic, living nature of Palestinian cultural practices, which include oral traditions and community-led efforts.



**Figure 4.** Liberation Heritage Framework Components

### *Development of the Liberation Heritage Framework*

The Liberation Heritage framework, developed based on the previous thematic and critical analyses, redefines heritage as a dynamic, community-driven resource integral to cultural survival and political resistance. Unlike traditional heritage conservation models that focus primarily on material artifacts and monumental preservation, Liberation Heritage shifts the focus to community agency, intangible heritage, and the active use of digital media as essential tools for cultural survival. This framework challenges conventional Western models by emphasizing the living, evolving nature of heritage, where local communities actively engage in the preservation and transmission of their cultural practices, stories, and identities.

This framework directly answers the research questions posed at the start of the study, specifically about how Palestinian communities are using both traditional and innovative methods to preserve their cultural heritage amidst occupation and external pressures. By focusing on community-led practices, intangible heritage, and the empowerment through digital media, the framework provides a comprehensive response to the question of how marginalized communities especially in conflict zones can resist cultural erasure and assert their identities.

The findings highlight the Liberation Heritage framework as a tool for understanding heritage practices that go beyond static preservation, emphasizing the agency of communities in reclaiming their cultural identities. These findings resonate with Ghorzang's [57] argument that digital media empowers marginalized communities by enabling them to document, share, and assert their heritage, counteracting the forces that seek to erase or commodify their cultural practices.

Table 5 outlines the key components of the Liberation Heritage framework, which were developed from the study's findings. These components reflect the dynamic, community-centered approach to heritage preservation. Each element is designed to address the unique challenges faced by communities, particularly in conflict zones like Palestine, where heritage preservation cannot solely rely on traditional material conservation methods. Instead, it integrates local knowledge systems, the living practices of communities, and the transformative power of digital technologies. The following components are essential to the framework:

**Table 5.** Key Components of the Liberation Heritage Framework

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
Community-Led Heritage	Focuses on the active role of local communities in preserving and transmitting heritage, emphasizing community agency and local knowledge systems as essential to cultural survival [4], [58].
Intangible Heritage	Highlights the importance of oral histories, traditions, and performances as integral elements of Palestinian cultural heritage, often overlooked by traditional conservation models [59], [60].
Digital Media as Empowerment	Examines the role of digital media in heritage reclamation, allowing Palestinian communities to document, share, and assert their heritage on global platforms, countering the colonial narratives of erasure [61], [62].

Table 5 clearly illustrates the key components of the Liberation Heritage framework. The emphasis on community-led heritage challenges the conventional top-down models of heritage conservation, which often neglect the living, evolving aspects of cultural practices. Intangible heritage plays a critical role, as it ensures that practices such as oral traditions and communal rituals, often sidelined by traditional conservation frameworks, are recognized as fundamental components

of cultural identity and resistance. Moreover, the integration of digital media as a tool for empowerment underscores the role of technology in facilitating global engagement with local heritage, making it possible for communities to share their stories and preserve their traditions beyond physical boundaries.

This approach provides a more inclusive and relevant model for heritage preservation, one that is rooted in local agency and cultural survival. It aligns with the goals of the study, which sought to understand how Palestinian communities, through both traditional practices and innovative digital tools, preserve their heritage in the face of occupation and external erasure. By highlighting Liberation Heritage as a framework that incorporates both intangible heritage and digital media, this study offers a model that can be applied not only to Palestine but to other marginalized communities around the world.



**Figure 5.** Liberation Heritage Framework Overview

The development of the Liberation Heritage framework is a direct response to the challenges presented by traditional heritage conservation models, which often overlook the agency of local communities and the role of intangible cultural practices in preserving identity. This framework offers a more nuanced, adaptable, and decolonial approach to heritage conservation, one that recognizes the interconnectedness of community, memory, and digital media. It provides a comprehensive model for understanding how heritage can be preserved and transmitted in a way that empowers communities, fosters cultural survival, and resists cultural erasure in conflict zones.

### ***Comparative Analysis of Palestinian Heritage Practices***

The comparative analysis reveals that the heritage preservation practices employed by Palestinian communities are similar to those used in other conflict-affected and colonized regions. Similar to Indigenous communities and postcolonial nations, Palestinians utilize oral traditions, community rituals, and digital media as tools for heritage reclamation and resistance. The findings suggest that the Liberation Heritage framework can be applied more broadly to other marginalized communities that face similar challenges of cultural erasure and colonialism [63], [64].

**Table 6.** Comparative Analysis of Heritage Preservation in Conflict Zones

Region	Heritage Preservation Strategies
Palestine	Community-led efforts, oral histories, and digital media used as tools of resistance and cultural survival [65], [66].
Indigenous Communities	Similar practices of community-based preservation and oral traditions, alongside the use of digital media for cultural reclamation [67].
Postcolonial Regions	Preservation through community rituals and collective memory, often using digital media to assert cultural identity [68].

Table 6 presents the results of the comparative analysis between Palestinian heritage preservation and similar practices in other conflict zones. The comparison illustrates that the strategies used by Palestinians to preserve their heritage through community-led efforts, oral histories, and digital media are consistent with those employed by other marginalized communities globally. This further supports the Liberation Heritage framework as a universal model for decolonizing heritage preservation practices.

### *Discussion*

The results of this study underscore the significant role that heritage as resistance plays in the preservation of Palestinian cultural identity. The findings align with previous research on heritage as a tool of resistance in conflict zones. Scholars such as Sasaki and Baba [69] and Cerezo et al. [70] have long emphasized the link between heritage and identity formation in marginalized communities, particularly in the context of occupation and colonialism. However, this study adds a new layer by specifically examining how digital media is reshaping the ways in which Palestinians engage with and preserve their heritage. While earlier studies have discussed heritage preservation in physical terms, this research highlights the transformative power of social media platforms and digital storytelling as key tools in Palestinian heritage preservation.

One of the major contributions of this study is the development of the Liberation Heritage framework, which redefines heritage as a living, dynamic resource tied to cultural survival and political resistance. This framework builds on existing literature on decolonial approaches to heritage preservation, including the work of Eichler [71] and Lim et al. [72], who call for a shift toward community-led and intangible heritage preservation. However, this study takes the discussion further by integrating digital media as a central component of the heritage preservation process. Digital platforms, such as Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, provide Palestinians with the means to not only document their cultural practices but also share them globally, counteracting the suppression of their heritage through external forces.

The findings also align with Shao [73], which emphasizes the importance of global media flows in enabling marginalized communities to reshape their cultural narratives. Palestinians, through social media, have successfully created spaces where their heritage is no longer confined to physical boundaries but can be shared and validated on a global scale. This is particularly relevant in the context of Palestinian cultural heritage, which has often been subjected to erasure through the destruction of cultural sites and the imposition of external narratives. The study builds on Shehadeh [62], showing how digital technologies enable Palestinians to bypass traditional cultural gatekeepers and assert their own heritage.

While Western heritage conservation models have often emphasized material heritage, this study critiques these frameworks for their inability to encompass intangible cultural heritage, such

as oral traditions and community rituals, which are vital to the Palestinian experience. Aschner Rosselli [74] and Omodan and Dastile [75] focus primarily on physical monuments, which makes them ill-suited to address the heritage practices of communities living under occupation. In contrast, Liberation Heritage offers a more inclusive and decolonial framework that recognizes community agency and the preservation of intangible heritage as equally significant to material preservation.

This research also contributes to the growing field of digital heritage, a relatively new area of study that examines how digital technologies are used to document, preserve, and share cultural heritage in the contemporary world. While there is increasing attention on the role of digital media in heritage preservation, particularly in conflict zones, this study is one of the first to specifically examine digital media in the Palestinian context. By focusing on the ways in which Palestinian communities engage with digital platforms to reclaim their heritage, the study expands the scope of digital heritage research and provides valuable insights into how marginalized communities can use technology to preserve their cultural identities.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis with other colonized or conflict-affected regions demonstrates that the Liberation Heritage framework is not only applicable to Palestine but can also be a model for other communities facing similar challenges of cultural erasure and colonization. Indigenous communities, as well as postcolonial societies, have long used community-based preservation methods and oral traditions to maintain their cultural identities. The Liberation Heritage framework provides a global model that can be adapted to other contexts where heritage practices are threatened by external forces [49], [76].

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of digital media with the concept of Liberation Heritage. While previous studies have explored heritage preservation in physical and intangible terms, this study is among the first to examine the intersection of digital media and heritage resistance in conflict zones. It challenges traditional views of heritage conservation, advocating for a more inclusive and decolonial approach that recognizes the full spectrum of heritage practices material, intangible, and digital as equally important for cultural survival and political resistance.

## CONCLUSION

This study investigates the role of heritage preservation in Palestinian communities, emphasizing the concept of heritage as resistance and the development of the Liberation Heritage framework. The findings reveal that Palestinian communities actively preserve and transmit their cultural heritage through oral histories, community-driven initiatives, and the use of digital media. By utilizing digital platforms such as social media, Palestinians can reclaim their heritage, challenge colonial narratives, and assert their cultural identity on a global scale. This research contributes to the field by presenting the Liberation Heritage framework as a dynamic, community-centered model that redefines heritage as a means of cultural survival and political resistance, transcending traditional Western-centric conservation paradigms. The study also explores the intersection of heritage preservation and digital media, providing insights into how marginalized communities can leverage social media to document, share, and safeguard their cultural narratives. The Liberation Heritage framework not only critiques conventional preservation models but also offers a decolonial approach with global applicability, particularly in conflict-affected regions. It underscores the transformative potential of digital media in heritage conservation, emphasizing the role of community agency, intangible heritage, and digital empowerment. For readers in the fields

of language, technology, and social media, the study suggests that decolonizing heritage in conflict zones requires viewing digital platforms as linguistic infrastructures, where algorithms and linguistic choices mediate the visibility and credibility of cultural narratives. Future research could further test the Liberation Heritage framework through comparative platform analysis and qualitative methods to explore how authenticity and resistance are negotiated across different digital environments.

## LIMITATIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into Palestinian heritage preservation through the Liberation Heritage framework, there are several limitations that should be considered. First, the research primarily relies on secondary data sources, including oral histories, social media content, and archival documents, which may not fully capture the richness of Palestinian heritage practices in situ. Direct fieldwork and primary data collection in Gaza or other Palestinian territories would have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the community-driven preservation efforts, but these were constrained due to ongoing political and logistical challenges in the region. Additionally, the scope of this study was limited to examining digital media as a tool for heritage preservation within Palestinian communities. While this focus is significant, it does not encompass other potential forms of digital resistance, such as the use of virtual reality or augmented reality, which could be explored in future studies. Furthermore, the study's comparative analysis with other conflict-affected regions is based on existing literature, which may not fully capture the nuanced ways in which different communities use digital media for heritage preservation. Future research could expand this comparison with more empirical data from diverse conflict zones to better understand the global applicability of the Liberation Heritage framework.

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Z. M. S. conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, and analyzed the results. M. H. A. conducted the literature review, coordinated data collection, and drafted the manuscript. Both authors contributed to the revision and final approval of the manuscript.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

The authors declare that ChatGPT 5 Plus was used to assist in refining the language of this manuscript, particularly to enhance clarity, coherence, and academic tone. Additionally, Napkin.ai and Gemini Plus were utilized for generating and refining the graphical representations included in the manuscript. These tools were not employed in any part of the research design, data analysis, interpretation, or the development of core ideas, arguments, or conclusions. All such elements were independently developed by the authors, who take full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work.

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