



## Keffiyeh trend on social media as a form of solidarity for Palestine

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the widespread adoption of the keffiyeh trend within the global community, including Indonesia, as a form of solidarity in support of Palestine. The surge in the keffiyeh trend intensified following Israel's forceful assault on Palestine, purportedly in response to Hamas' actions on October 7, 2023. Employing virtual ethnography through the analysis of social media content, the research delves into the historical context of the keffiyeh among Arabs. Known by different names across various Arab nations, such as *kufiyah*, *gutrah* in Saudi Arabia, *shemag* in Iraq, and *keffiyeh* in Palestine, this head-to-neck covering initially served as protection for village workers during outdoor activities. In the 1980s, the keffiyeh underwent a transformation into a fashion accessory, gaining popularity among young individuals with a bohemian style in New York. Notably, major global brands like Balenciaga and Louis Vuitton even incorporated keffiyeh motifs into their products. Despite its fading significance, the keffiyeh experienced a resurgence as a symbol of solidarity during global demonstrations and actions defending Palestine following Israel's renewed attacks. Participants in the Palestine Defense March prominently featured the keffiyeh, sharing images on social media platforms, notably Instagram, leading to a resurgence of the keffiyeh trend within the wider community.

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## Introduction

The armed conflict between Hamas and Israel from October 07, 2023, to date is still on going. The escalation of the war has become increasingly violent as both sides feel justified in continuing their attacks. Armed conflict continues to claim thousands of lives and cause millions of people to suffer. According to the UN Office of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), this war is the deadliest war in the Israeli-Palestinian region in the last 50 years. The war has affected Palestine more than Israel. This is reflected in the disproportionate proportion of deaths and injuries. At least 86.8% of the dead and 82.2% of the injured were Palestinians (Priambada, 2023).

Since the declaration of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, the Palestinian and Israeli people have been very familiar with war and death. They are constantly under the shadow of violent wars. There have been at least three major wars between Israel and the coalition forces of neighboring countries, including Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. The first was the Arab Israeli War of 1948, the next was the Six-Day War of 1967, and the third was the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Then Israel fought two wars on Lebanese soil. Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Syrian Army. The second battle took place in 2006 against the Lebanese political and armed group Hezbollah. And before 2023, there were four major open battles between Israel and Palestinian armed groups. The four battles took place in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021 (Priambada, 2023).

All the victims of these wars were mostly civilians. The number of deaths is huge. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), at least 6,715 people were killed and 158,867 injured between January 2008 and September 2023. Of these, 95.4% of the dead and 96% of the injured were

Palestinians. The highest number of victims were mainly women and children. This shows that in the Israeli-Palestinian armed conflict, Palestinian civilians are the group most at risk of becoming fatal victims of war (Priambada, 2023).

The open acts of war crimes and genocide committed by Israel have led to a wave of demonstrations in support of Palestine in various countries around the world. Demonstrations are not only carried out by countries in the Middle East such as Turkey, Bahrain, and others. Countries in various continents such as Europe, Asia, Australia, and America also held demonstrations to defend and support Palestine. Tens to hundreds of thousands of people participated in these demonstrations and demanded the same thing: a ceasefire, an end to Israeli aggression, and Palestinian independence (blq/bac, 2023).

Indonesia has also been active in various demonstrations in defense of Palestine, ranging from diplomacy, peace rallies in various cities and various donations for the people of Gaza, Palestine. Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi said that Indonesia has gone all out to conduct diplomacy on the Palestinian issue. Indonesia is one of the countries that loudly voiced that Israel's military aggression should be stopped in high-level international forums.

In addition to diplomatic efforts and humanitarian aid, various major cities in Indonesia held peaceful rallies to support Palestine. This was done to show the world that Indonesia has always supported the freedom of Palestine, which was the first Muslim country to recognize Indonesia's independence. The peak of the rally in support of Palestine was held at the National Monument (Monas) on November 11, 2023. Without exception, people from all walks of life participated in this rally. There were ordinary people, politicians, government officials and artists. They called for

humanitarian appeals such as waving the Palestinian flag, poster attributes and clothes and headscarves symbolizing solidarity for Palestine.

Demonstrations around the world, including in Indonesia, are an expression of solidarity with Palestine. The Palestinian issue is now no longer considered a religious issue but a humanitarian issue. The demonstrators carried posters in support of Palestine and wore keffiyeh. Keffiyeh is usually white with a black or red checkered pattern, but other color variations also exist. The keffiyeh is often seen as a symbol of Arab identity and pride, especially in the Palestinian territories that conflict with Israel. Keffiyeh is not just a cloth head covering, but also has meanings related to the history, culture and struggles of the Arab community. The keffiyeh is a symbol of resistance and unity of the Arab community fighting for independence and rights from foreign colonialism and oppression. The keffiyeh also represents Arab social and religious values such as loyalty, courage, modesty, and piety (Demanda, 2023).

The trend of keffiyeh is currently in demand and is widely used by all circles of society, whether ordinary people or public figures such as public officials and artists as a form of support and solidarity with the Palestinian people. Moments when using keffiyeh either during demonstrations or other activities are immortalized and uploaded to social media, especially on Instagram. The use of keffiyeh varies, some are used as a scarf, worn like a headscarf and some are used as headgear and face depending on each reference.

This trend is increasingly widespread due to the ease of accessing social media without space restrictions. Social media has become a limitless space for public figures to influence the public about their lifestyle, including using keffiyeh. More and more people are using keffiyeh in their

various activities even though they are not participating in the Palestine Defense March. Keffiyeh is currently very easy to obtain and available in various e-commerce, even some famous designers and famous artist jilbab brands issued a series of jilbabs with keffiyeh motifs.

This research examines the history of keffiyeh in Middle Eastern culture and examines the trend of keffiyeh which is widely used by Indonesian people, both public figures such as artists, public officials, and ordinary people as a form of solidarity with the Palestinian people and finally this research discusses the commodification of keffiyeh from a symbol of resistance identity to a traded commodity.

## Method

This research is a virtual ethnography that seeks to explore more deeply the interaction of research objects in cyberspace or the virtual world. Virtual ethnography or netnography is a research process using the virtual world such as social media as a research location. Researchers are not physically present in the activities of the object under study. The data collection method in this study uses participant observation by specifically observing the social media of the object under study, namely Instagram (Hine, 2000). Primary data in this research is in the form of official news from online newspapers related to Israeli attacks on Palestine and various news about demonstrations in defense of Palestine that occurred in various countries, especially in Indonesia. Other primary data are social media, especially Instagram accounts owned by artists, hijab entrepreneurs and ordinary people who display photos when they use keffiyeh. While secondary data in this research is books, e-books, and other journal articles related to this research. The data analysis technique used in this research consists

of document analysis and reading and recording techniques, which are analyzed using Emile Durkheim's solidarity theory, cultural commodification theory and other theories that can help analyze more deeply.

## Results and Discussion

### *History of keffiyeh*

Keffiyeh is a type of head-to-neck covering that has been part of Middle Eastern culture for centuries (Pozzo, B., 2020). It is made of cotton, wool and even silk with plaid or striped patterns and is worn by men and women from various countries in the Middle East Region, Turkey in West Asia, and North Africa. The history of the keffiyeh can be traced back to classical Egyptian times, and it was known by different names in different regions. Egyptians call it *kufiyah*, *gutrah* in Saudi Arabia, *shemag* in Iraq, and *keffiyeh* in Palestine (Sari, Y.M., 2021).

The history of keffiyeh is still much in question. However, most people know that the word keffiyeh is associated with the city of Kufa in Iraq, south of Baghdad along the Euphrates River. In various sources it is mentioned that there was a battle between Arab and Persian forces near Kufa in the seventh century. The Arabs are said to have used ropes made of camel hair to secure their head dresses and to recognize each other during battle. Others say that the keffiyeh originated in the Mesopotamian civilization before Islam and was worn by Sumerian and Babylonian priests around 5,000 years ago (Saber, 2021).

In its development, the keffiyeh was used by rural working people and Bedouin tribes in Palestine. These two groups wear the cloth over their heads to cover the back of the neck and protect themselves from the hot sun in summer and the cold in winter. Keffiyeh is also used when doing outdoor activities and

avoiding sandstorms. Urban or educated Palestinians usually wear a *fez* or *tarboush*, a dark red Palestinian hat popularized by the Ottoman ruler Mahmud II and adopted by the locals as daily wear (Tynan, 2019). Although the use of the keffiyeh was not originally intended to differentiate social classes, it seems that at that time the keffiyeh was intended for the working class in the village and the *fez* or *tarboush* for the educated in the city.

After the Turkish empire lost its eastern territories in World War I and the Arab uprisings against British colonial rule in 1936-1939, Palestinians used keffiyeh to cover their faces and hide their identities to avoid being caught. Most of the fighters in the uprising were villagers who used keffiyeh. When they infiltrated the city, they were easily recognized and arrested by British soldiers. This led the leaders of the uprising to order urbanites of all social classes to abandon the *tarboush* or *fez* and wear the keffiyeh, making it difficult to identify the revolutionaries fighting the British. The symbol remained the staple icon of Palestinian nationhood after the Nakba and the establishment of the state of Israel (Saber, 2021).

Keffiyeh became increasingly known and popular among the world community in the 1960s after the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat popularized the cloth and always used it in various events especially when making speeches in front of the United Nations. The keffiyeh is always positioned on his head with the longer end of the cloth placed on his right shoulder and shaped in such a way as a map of Palestine before 1948. In 1967 until the Oslo Accords in 1993, Israel banned the Palestinian flag from being flown in the country. This made Palestinians increasingly use keffiyeh as a symbol of identity that can be carried and seen every where. Keffiyeh developed into a symbol of identity and resistance among the Arab



community (Rahman, 2019).

By the end of the 20th century, the keffiyeh was widely used in various countries and Palestinian activists and defenders around the world. They realized that wearing the keffiyeh was a powerful way to show solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Today, the keffiyeh continues to be used by Palestinian activists and advocates to show solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Given the status of the keffiyeh and the symbolism of its struggle, the Palestinian Authority (PA) Ministry of Education and Higher Education established National Keffiyeh Day to coincide with the anniversary of the proclamation of independence in November. On this day, Palestinians wear the keffiyeh as a symbol of unity, the Palestinian struggle, and the Palestinian intifada (Saber, 2021).

### ***Keffiyeh as a form of solidarity with Palestine on social media***

Various news about Israeli attacks on the people of Gaza in Palestine which are considered beyond the limits of human reason are still widely posted on online news and social media. Even when the United Nations (UN) Security Council voted on the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian war and the majority called for a ceasefire, the Israeli Defense Forces continued to bomb the Gaza Strip from north to south this Saturday (September 9, 2023) local time. This attack came after the United States used its veto in the UN Security Council to protect its allies from calls for a global ceasefire (Rahman, 2023).

The actions in defense of Palestine in various countries are continuing, especially in Indonesia. Various cities have organized various forms of activities in defense of Palestine, ranging from grand recitations, carnivals, long marches, fundraising, grand speeches, and various commemorations of world holidays, CFD (Car Free Days)

and others. The people who participated in these activities consisted of various groups of ordinary people or public figures such as artists or government officials. They wear various attributes that show their support for Palestine.

The various attributes used by them include Palestinian flags, scarves, headbands, and headscarves, all three of which are keffiyeh. It's just that the way to use it is different. Some are used for headscarves; some are used as scarves, and some are used to cover the head and face like the use of keffiyeh in general.

The use of keffiyeh in every Palestine defense rally, whether peaceful or demonstration, has been widely practiced. From supermodel Bella Hadid who participated in the rally in New York to many Indonesian artists such as Sazkia Adya Mecca, Syifa Hadju, Dinda Hauw and other artists wearing the cloth as a form of solidarity with the Palestinian people. Various media including online media massively reported about it. The artists who participated in the Palestine rally also uploaded photos of them wearing the keffiyeh on their social media, especially Instagram.

Instagram is a photo sharing application that can be accessed by other connected users in the social network. Instagram has an interface for sharing photos, short narratives, and other activities. Instagram is also used by artists to present themselves as a group that cares about the condition of the Palestinian people. Various photos that they share and upload on Instagram are seen by their followers.

According to Barthes, photos are understood as signs that are read like texts that have signs and markers. This text is like a narrative that the uploader wants to convey to other users who see it (Hoed. 2011). In this case, the message to be conveyed is the form of concern and solidarity that public figures, especially Indonesian artists, want to show

towards the situation of the Palestinian people who continue to suffer from Israeli military aggression and most of the victims are children and women.

According to Durkheim, social solidarity refers to a form of social relationship between individuals and groups that is based on moral sentiments and shared beliefs and driven by shared emotional experiences. Durkheim called it mechanical solidarity, which is solidarity that arises from mutual trust in a group based on moral states and strengthened by shared emotional experiences. Durkheim said that a society characterized by mechanical solidarity is formed based on the assumption that togetherness and similarity are not limited to issues of ideology, religion, taste or ethnicity, but the similarity is seen from the aspect of the goals to be achieved (Carithers, 1977).

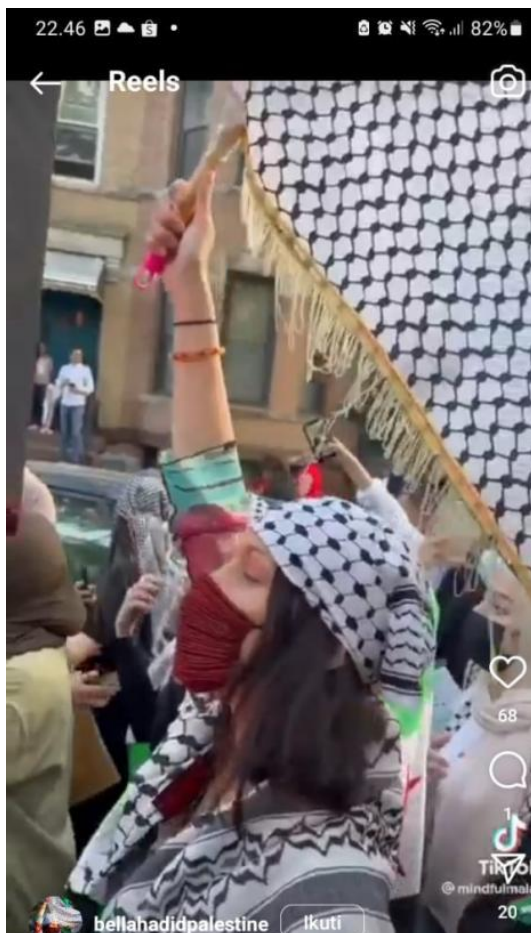


Image 1: Bella Hadid joins a demonstration in defense of Palestine on Bay Ridge Street in New York City.



Figure 2: Several Indonesian artists participated in the protest for Palestine at Monas on November 06, 2023.

The global community acts based on collective consciousness, a sense of awareness that there should be no more colonialism, human rights violations, and genocide in this century. When mechanical solidarity emerges, individual feelings disappear and are replaced by collective consciousness. Sometimes people even act outside their consciousness because they are carried away by the collective consciousness (Fremenko and Yaroslava, 2012).

### *From symbol of resistance to traded commodity*

Keffiyeh in its early history was masculine and usually used by men. But gradually women also used it because keffiyeh became a symbol of resistance and struggle. Some of the first Palestinian women who used it were

Dalal Mughrabi and Leila Khalid. Dalal died during the PLO military action in Israel and is remembered and honored as a true woman by Palestinian women (Wirayuda, 2023). To this day, the keffiyeh is used as a headscarf or scarf for women around the world.

The Palestinian keffiyeh has become an important national symbol for resisting occupation, oppression, persecution, challenging and rejecting injustice, oppression, and persecution. The keffiyeh remains a symbol of sovereignty, identity, existence, and revolution and a unifying symbol of the Palestinian people, at home and abroad, and is a symbol of revolution and struggle (Wirayuda, 2023).

In addition to the symbols above, Keffiyeh also has many symbols that are interpreted variously by Palestinians. The conspicuous black stitches on the white keffiyeh as fishing nets, beehives, joined hands, or traces of dirt and sweat wiping the worker's brow. Some say it is a grain of wheat. There are also those who say it is barbed wire. The net symbol is interpreted as a picture of collectivism, entanglement, and dependence on one another. There are also those who interpret that the bird-like motif on the edge of the keffiyeh represents the Palestinian olive tree which shows strength and resilience. Olives, in all forms such as olive oil, olive oil products (such as soap), and olive wood are very important aspects of Palestinian culinary, social, and economic life (Saber, 2021).

The Palestinian and Suriyah keffiyeh are black and white, while the Saudi and Jordanian red and white checkered *shemagh* was designed by British General John Bagot Glubb in the 1930s to distinguish Arabs who were loyal to British rule and those who were considered rebellious against the British (Saber, 2021).

In its development, the keffiyeh became a fashion trend during a 1988 Time Magazine article that discussed the Palestinian keffiyeh

in the American bohemian street style and its connection to the first Palestinian intifada (the Palestinian uprising in the Gaza strip in 1987). The man interviewed by the magazine had no idea that the keffiyeh he was wearing was so important and a symbol of identity and resistance for the Palestinian people (Al-Khatib, A. 2018).

Keffiyehs were mass-produced in China and flooded the market in 2000. In addition to affordable mass-market products, high-end designers have produced their own versions, including Balenciaga's version in 2007, which cost \$3,000, as well as versions from Chanel, Fendi and Louis Vuitton. This famous fashion brand sells scarves that are admittedly inspired by keffiyeh and combined with Louis Vuitton's signature style. The brand sells the scarf for US\$705 or around Rp10 million.

Of course, these brands have been criticized by many netizens for not recognizing the nationalistic values of keffiyeh and only taking advantage for themselves. Some even commented that the blue and white colors on Louis Vuitton's scarf are deliberately choosing the colors of the Israeli flag.



Figure 3: Citizen protests on Instagram about the blue Louis Vuitton scarf (source from @JatIkhwan)





Figures 4 and 5: Collection of headscarves with keffiyeh motifs in Ioan Gunawan and Vivi Zubedi's Palestine series.

The different views on the keffiyeh made it more popular and entered the fashion world. Over time, keffiyeh as a symbol of resistance and a symbol of Palestinian identity began to fade. Keffiyeh is only considered as a fashion item that has nothing to do with any symbol. Many world celebrities such as David Beckham, Kanye West, Colin Farrell, Ricky Martin, and others use keffiyeh as a complement to their fashion.

The Israeli military aggression against the Palestinian people since the Hamas attack on October 07, 2023, and the many waves of protests and peaceful actions carried out

by people from various parts of the world using keffiyeh and other attributes to show their solidarity with the Palestinian people remind us of the true meaning of keffiyeh. Keffiyeh is not just an aesthetic complement but has a deep meaning for the struggle of the Palestinian people.

But still, the awareness of the importance of keffiyeh becomes a fertile ground for capitalist store profits even with the frill that the proceeds from the sale of keffiyeh or jilbab series will be donated to the Palestinian people. Many headscarf brands in Indonesia issue head scarves with the



special series, some of them are Vivi Zubedi, Ivan Gunawan and others.

This hijab with keffiyeh motif is not only issued by well-known brands at quite expensive prices. Cheaper versions have been bought one commerce at very affordable prices and can be purchased by the wider community. Of course, it is not surprising that the trend of keffiyeh used either as a headscarf or scarf has been widely found today. The booming keffiyeh trend cannot be separated from the interests of capitalism, which considers that all forms of production and reproduction can be commoditized. The main goal in capitalism is the collection of profits through the difference between exchange value and use value (Purwati, 2017).

The use of keffiyeh as a headscarf or hijab with keffiyeh and Palestinian motifs has become popular today not without reason. The users are consumers who base their decision to use keffiyeh head scarves on very strong reasons such as solidarity with the Palestinian people and other reasons. Karl Marx once said that ideology, like religion, is the opium of society. The same applies to popular culture. The dimness of an object's meaning in the face of exchange value is a necessity in the context of capitalism (Purwati, 2017).

## Conclusion

Keffiyeh has a very long history for the Arabs, especially countries that have experienced colonization, especially Palestine. Keffiyeh which was originally just an ordinary cloth used to protect themselves for workers in the village when doing activities outside to avoid the sun and dust then turned into the identity of the fighters who fought the British at that time. In its development, keffiyeh turned into a fashion item so that the wider community began to forget the deep meaning of keffiyeh. The

world community was then reminded of the "real" meaning of keffiyeh after Israel blindly attacked Palestine again. Either the use of keffiyeh as a fashion accessory and for aesthetic purposes so separated from its original meaning or really used as a sense of solidarity and sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian people today. But clearly, we all hope that the Palestinians get their rights and independence and live as a country that enjoys independence like any other country.

## Declaration of Ownership

This article is my original work.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

## Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Shiddiq Jember, Indonesia.

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