**Who Holds the Power in Soft Power?**

Dr. Melissa Nisbett
King’s College London

**Introduction**

In a world where global relations are becoming increasingly complex, intercultural understanding has perhaps never been so important. Over the last 10 years, terms such as “soft power” and “cultural diplomacy” have received increasing political attention and have gained traction within governments around the world (for example, in Britain, the United States, Russia, Australia, China, and India). Whether viewed as foreign policy or cultural policy, governments have undoubtedly begun to take the role of culture within international relations more seriously.

There has been some scholarly interest alongside this political engagement. A recent issue of the *International Journal of Cultural Policy* was dedicated to cultural diplomacy. This was encouraging, since despite the subject straddling political science, international relations, and cultural policy studies, there has been remarkably little research. The discussion of instrumentalism within cultural policy studies is well rehearsed and cultural policy making from economic and social angles has been thoroughly explored (see, for example, Belfiore 2002; Gray 2007; Mirza 2006). Yet almost no attention has been paid to the examination of cultural policy from a foreign policy perspective.

This article contributes to filling this gap in the literature. It is based on the textual analysis of a range of policy documents and semi-structured qualitative interviews with government officials, political advisors, arts managers, and cultural practitioners including artists and curators. The data sets were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), a method derived from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006). This article starts by defining the key terms neoliberalism, power, cultural diplomacy and soft power, and critiquing the published work, beginning with the problems of the basic terminology and conceptualizations. I will then introduce the British case, to explore how cultural diplomacy and soft power are communicated at a government level. The discussion is then extrapolated to consider these terms and practices in relation to global changes, the spread of neoliberalism and the shifting world order. It ultimately asks: who holds the power in soft power?

**Terms and Concepts**

Neoliberalism

Before defining the key terms soft power and cultural diplomacy, it is important to firstly flesh out the concept of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a sprawling term that is applied very loosely both within academic critique and mainstream media commentary. In this article, I am referring to a distinct theory of political economic practices that have prevailed in the United States, Japan, and across Western Europe since the late 1970s. It has been defined by David Harvey (2005:2) as a theory that “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade”.

While there is an acknowledgment that neoliberalism is not new, indeed some scholars date its intellectual formation to the 1930s (Mirowksi and Plehwe 2009), it gained traction and momentum with the Reagan (1981–1989) and Thatcher (1979–1990) governments in the United States and United Kingdom, respectively, which sought to reduce the public sector, while supporting the private sector, ultimately helping large corporations to grow and create monopolies. While Chalfin (2010:2) claims that neoliberalism “reigns supreme as the preeminent political economic pathway of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the world over”, a more nuanced reflection is required. Whilst there has been an “emphatic turn towards neoliberalism” (Harvey 2005:2) in theory and practice over the last 40 years, it has not been adopted globally in a straightforward, even or unilinear way. Many countries in Asia, for example, have modified versions of neoliberal policies, which have been incorporated into existing frameworks that have also preserved some aspects of state provision, resulting in diluted versions of neoliberalism (Pasha 2001). A case in point is China, following the death of Mao Zedong (Chairman Mao). In the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping used market socialism (a blend of public ownership and market-driven economics) to lead the country through a series of extensive reforms to liberalize the communist-ruled economy. This resulted in growth that not only surpassed the neighboring countries of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, but which is unparalleled anywhere in the world (Harvey 2005).

Whilst some countries have voluntarily embraced neoliberalism or a modified form of it, others have had neoliberal policies imposed on them, despite their attempts to resist. This has been partially due to international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and partly through direct pressure by countries such as the United States. Academic Kalim Siddiqui (2012) argues that international financial institutions continue to impose neoliberal policies on South America and other regions across the developing world such as Africa. Neoliberalism has had disastrous consequences for some countries in South America, including economic instability and the stifling of growth. Left-wing parties in this part of the world strive to find alternatives and continue to have credibility and electoral support (for a detailed discussion, see Sader 2008). Narratives such as these are perhaps what led scholar Cees J. Hamelink to claim back in 1999 that 90 percent of the world’s population either lived in, or was indirectly affected by, free market economies (and that this proportion had grown from around 20 percent in the 1970s). If countries do not have governments that subscribe to neoliberal politics, they are nevertheless affected by “the long march of the Neoliberal Revolution” (Hall 2011:705) across the globe.[[1]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1)

Soft Power

For the remainder of this section, I will spend some time sketching out and discussing the concepts of soft power and power itself, and then briefly turn my attention to the term cultural diplomacy, before moving on to consider the British case in practice. Soft power is a term that was coined by the political scientist Joseph Nye in 1990 to describe the ability of one country to shape the preferences of another, and to do so through attraction and influence, rather than coercion. The concept emerged within the context of the Cold War, during which American art and culture (such as jazz and the avant-garde Abstract Expressionism movement) was funded[[2]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn2) and exported across the world for global consumption, promoting the values of intellectual freedom and, more broadly, liberal modern democracy, through self-expression and creativity. This was the antithesis of the alternative offered by the communist Soviet Union. Cultural products have continued to be produced in vast quantities and marketed aggressively to the rest of the world. This is the reason why the terms soft power and cultural diplomacy are associated with cultural imperialism and propaganda.[[3]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn3) This historicity is important in understanding not only where the term soft power came from and how it specifically refers to a particular moment in time, but also in considering its trajectory over the last 25 years. Nye invented the term in response to claims made by academics, commentators, and advisors in the 1980s that America had overstretched its resources during the Cold War and that this would lead to a decline in its position within the international system and on the world stage. While his initial formulation was in response to these “declinists”, Nye’s notion of soft power has changed over the years, which can be observed across a number of his texts (see Nye 1990, 2002, 2004). These shifts are a reflection of the political context of the day. Whilst these changes have prompted critics to argue that Nye’s formulation is “maddeningly inconsistent” (Layne 2010:54), there is some sense in having a concept that can accommodate variation in response to the enormous changes across the world stage and within international relations such as globalization, even if this does not make life easy for scholars and their analysis.

What is perhaps more problematic is the poor explication of the term. Nye’s conceptualization of soft power was not fully elucidated in 1990 in general terms or in any detail. He was criticized for this and so *Soft Power—The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004) was an attempt to develop the idea more fully. His descriptions and explanations go some way to sketching out the contours of soft power. However, Nye’s 2004 text lacks a coherent theoretical framework overall and is seemingly divorced from social and political theory. It fails to offer any serious scholarly rigor or analytic depth. An example is Nye’s opening remarks on the concept of power:

*Power is like the weather. Everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it […] Power is also like love, easier to experience than to define or measure, but no less real for that. The dictionary tells us that power is the capacity to do things* (2004:1).

I will not provide a critique of Nye’s writing on soft power, as fulsome commentary already exists elsewhere (see, for example, Parmar and Cox 2010). Instead, I will move away from the generalized and mutable concept offered by Nye throughout his texts, and turn to the issue of power itself. Social and political theory offers a far more sophisticated rendering of the concept of power than that offered by Nye.

Power

Power is the capacity to bring about consequences. It is connected to, but distinct from force (a means of coercion, often through physical strength or the threat of violence) and influence (a mechanism of persuasion that requires knowledge, credibility, respect, and trust). In this article, I refer to the work of the political sociologist Steven Lukes, in thinking further about the notion of power. Lukes claims that there are three dimensions of power. The first is explicit and unconcealed. It takes a prominent role in public decision making, and manifests in a person or group having power over another or others. One decision or person prevails over another. This idea was put forward by the political theorist Robert Dahl in his seminal book *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (1961). It followed the work of the American sociologist C. Wright Mills (1956), who noted that particular individuals occupied particular positions of power within social, economic, and political institutions across America, and thus formed a “power elite”.

The second dimension is covert power. This is not just about who or what group prevails, but who controls the agenda on which decisions are based or made. So this is not just about who makes the decisions, but who decides what decisions are to be made in the first place. In other words, who gets to decide what gets decided. It was Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz (1962) who developed this notion in their influential essay, the *Two Faces of Power*, which differentiated between overt and covert forms. The aim of the second dimension of power is to maintain the status quo, so that those in power stay in power and continue to have their interests served. This theory comes with methodological complications in terms of how to analyze these veiled dynamics, since such activities tend not to take place in open public life.

Steven Lukes took this further, and argued that there was another type of power that was even more hidden than the covert power theorized by Bachrach and Baratz, and therefore even more effective. He suggested that there was an insidious third dimension of power (1974), one that involved people having their beliefs and preferences shaped and affected by the powerful, often without them even realizing. A good example to illustrate this is the work of Edward Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud and founding father of public relations. Bernays rapidly increased the sales of *Lucky Strike* cigarettes by tackling the social taboo of women smoking in public. He drew inspiration from the techniques of psychoanalysis to connect the taboo around smoking with the suffrage movement. Bernays took advantage of the annual Easter parade in New York City in 1929 and asked rich debutantes to take part in a public march and to hide cigarettes on their person. At the same time, he simultaneously tipped off the press, incorrectly informing them that the suffragettes were planning to smoke in public as a protest. At a given moment, the young women had been instructed by Bernays to raise aloft their cigarettes, declaring them “torches of freedom”. This spectacle was instantly captured by the cameras and immortalized in print, in turn glamourizing smoking, driving up sales of Lucky Strikes, and abolishing the social taboo.[[4]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn4)

Lukes argued that it is this form of power that is the most powerful of all. It is the most effective because it is the power to influence the beliefs and ideas of others, inducing them to desire things, even if these things are in opposition to what would benefit them or be in their interests. So ordinary people, or those who are powerless, can show apparent consensus in their own manipulation in order to serve the powerful. According to Lukes, this idea of framing someone else’s choices does not even have to happen deliberately or with intent. He asserted that this third dimension of power is the most effective because it is the least observable. It is difficult to subject it to scrutiny and analysis, making it all the more pernicious. There is an obvious point of connection here with Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “symbolic violence”, explained by the sociologist as: “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002:167). So this is the kind of domination, both apparent as well as unconscious, that people propagate in everyday life. Due to the normalization of these actions and the way that they are practiced and repeated within so-called legitimate institutions and situations (for example, in the home, school or the workplace, as well as through adverts, films, and other cultural means), they are often unnoticed and reaffirmed.

This idea of the power to shape desires and beliefs maps very neatly onto the concept of soft power. In the words of Joseph Nye (2004:2), soft power is the ability “to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants”. Soft power can therefore reside both in the realm of the imagination, as well as within some kind of operationalized action. Soft power involves the assimilation of thoughts, beliefs and values, through sometimes subtle and imperceptible means. If this is Nye’s understanding of soft power, then it is Lukes’s third dimension of power that is brought to mind.

The global political stage adds another layer of complexity to this. Nye tells us that power is like the weather and like love, but it is unclear what he means. Does it mean that it is omnipresent? Is he suggesting that we are preoccupied by it? Does it mean that we are at the mercy of it? Does Nye believe that we can use our personal charm to make someone fall in love with us, as we might attract and seduce a lover? Sovereign states are not individuals. They have no higher authority to answer to and they usually act in their own self-interests. They can do what they like, within the accepted boundaries of international norms, rules and principles, and even then, there are frequent transgressions. Sometimes the motives of states are transparent and their movements and actions predictable, but often they are acting in an environment of instability or even anarchy, some might argue. One state does not simply have power over another, instead power is “chaotically distributed” (Nye in Parmar and Cox 2010:7). Power is also diffused. International Relations theorists remind us that the international system involves a range of state and non-state actors, such as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, multinational corporations, the media, cultural institutions, and so on. In the words of Joseph Nye, “world politics today is like a three-dimensional chess game” (2010:7), incorporating military power, and economic and transnational relations. There are various schools of thought within International Relations that involve different theoretical standpoints to consider the role of the state, whether states act in their own self-interest, what responsibility they have to the international community, how they interact with each other on a global level, how their ideological and moral commitments shape their policies and actions, and how they understand and relate to power. It could also be reasonably argued that all three dimensions of power are simultaneously at play and are often in (literal and metaphorical) conflict with one another.

There are a wide variety of examples to illustrate this complexity. One current case is the ambivalent relationship between Russia and the West. Russia used its power within the United Nationals Security Council to veto economic sanctions and military intervention against President Bashar al-Assad, despite it being widely known that the Syrian leader has used chemical weapons on his own people. Russia has a longstanding history of selling arms to the Syrian government and recently joined in the military action against the rebel forces challenging the president, of which there are over 1,000 opposition groups (British Broadcasting Corporation 2013). On the other side is Britain, the United States, and a range of European countries, which are seeking to remove President Assad from power due to his brutal regime against Syrian civilians. Russia does not want to lose its foothold in the Middle East and wants to be seen as a global player (and equal to the United States), and on top of this, seeks to resist Western (particularly American) expansionism. To add to this, these opposing parties are united against a common enemy: the barbaric Islamic State terrorists. At the same time, countries in the European Union and the United States have imposed economic sanctions on Russia for its military intervention in the Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. These restrictions have contributed to the country’s recent financial turmoil with the fall in oil prices and the collapse of the ruble. While this is just one briefly sketched example, it tells us that politics is not a zero-sum game. Rather, it says something about the complexities, contradictions, contestations, and agonisms of world politics today.[[5]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn5)

Cultural Diplomacy

Before moving onto a discussion of Britain’s approach to soft power, I would like to close this section with a few words on cultural diplomacy. Currently in Britain, the term soft power is widely used in political parlance over its related term cultural diplomacy. This was not the case 10 years ago, when there was a great deal of political discourse as well as policies and funding around the notion of cultural diplomacy (see, for example, House of Commons 2007; Nisbett 2013b). Like soft power, it has been argued that there is a lack of clarity about “what precisely the practice [of cultural diplomacy] entails” (Mark 2010:63). According to Bound et al. (2007:16), cultural diplomacy “is not easily defined”. As such, journal articles on the subject have a tendency not to define or even describe it (see, for example, Parsons 1985; Finn 2003; Gould-Davies 2003; Kennedy 2003; Vickers 2004; Channick 2005; Saeki 2005; Hicks 2007; Brademas 2009; Keith 2009). For the political scientist Milton C. Cummings, cultural diplomacy is “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (2003:1). This definition does not suggest that cultural diplomacy is a state matter, nor that its purpose is political. There has perhaps been a projection of political intent onto it by those latching onto the word “diplomacy” and its connotations of negotiation, peacekeeping, and international relations. At the same time, others have argued that cultural diplomacy is part of foreign relations (Mitchell 1986), although it is unclear how seriously it is taken by politicians. Most states take the normative position that the stick will always be mightier than the carrot and this comes through strongly in the literature, with cultural diplomacy dismissed as a “lesser tool” and a “minor cog in the gearbox of foreign policy” (Mark 2010:63). Reeves (2007) wearily asks what poetry can do to reduce biological weaponry, whilst Vaughan (2005) concludes that it is unrealistic to expect cultural diplomacy to bridge wide and deep political gulfs.

Many see cultural diplomacy as being closely linked to “cultural relations”, which is the focus of many longstanding institutions such as the Institute of International Education (United States), British Council (United Kingdom), Goethe-Institut (Germany), and Alliance Fran*ç*aise (France). All are well respected within the international system and play an obvious role within International Relations. Yet similarly, the literature suggests that cultural relations are paid little attention and not taken seriously. Diplomatic historian Akira Iriye reports that cultural relations are “frequently ridiculed” (1997:2) by practitioners of power politics. This was exemplified by President Nixon, who referred to the practice as “wish-dreams”, “woolly minded and idealist” (Reeves 2007:59). For many, cultural relations seem entirely dissociated from politics, almost like a natural phenomenon. In my own research, I have interviewed those working within cultural relations and I have asked my participants what the term means to them. The typical response to this question is usually a series of abstract nouns such as “exchange”, “reciprocity”, and “mutuality”. I understand what these words mean but this type of work, by its very nature, can be somewhat anecdotal, casual and imprecise, with emphasis placed on personal encounters, cordial conversations, and first impressions. However, this is difficult to justify as the basis of cultural policymaking, where evidence of effectiveness is increasingly underlined. Despite it being suggested that cultural diplomacy and cultural relations are not taken seriously, they are also accused of colonialism, imperialism, and propaganda (Reeves 2007).

Following on, much of the literature sees soft power and cultural diplomacy as unwaveringly positive. However, this work is frequently based on advocacy (for example, Bound et al. 2007), avoids empirical engagement (for example, Hill and Beadle 2014), and lacks a critical dimension (for example, Dexter Lord and Blankenberg 2015). It also recognizes that whilst these concepts will always come secondary to “hard power” or military capability, they remain valid as an important component in the mix. Bound et al. (2007:20) argue that such practices are vital in “providing the operating context for politics”. For American diplomat and academic Cynthia Schneider (2010), they will not solve political crises but they can help to reverse the decline in relations through increased understanding and respect. So we see an unevenness and inconsistency around the application, understanding and usage of these terms and concepts.

For some time now, the academic literature has been preoccupied with distinguishing the various terms cultural diplomacy, cultural relations, soft power, propaganda, and cultural imperialism. This is as present in Mitchell’s account in 1986 (sans soft power) as it is in Ang et al.’s recent contribution from 2015. Mitchell’s suggestion of a continuum (with propaganda at one end, cultural diplomacy in the middle and cultural relations at the other end) is helpful in an attempt to locate the key concepts and also understand their differences. To define something is to state its precise meaning, whereas a scale offers flexibility that is not possible through rigid formulations. Despite the potential of this for further theoretical exploration and development, it seems to have been wholly ignored. As such, Iriye was quite correct back in 1997 to argue that this whole area lacked theoretical progress. It seems that very little has changed over the last 20 years and the discussion has not moved on.

Indeed, it is now accepted that there is an abundance of terms and that these are used vaguely, loosely, and interchangeably (Nisbett 2013b). Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015:367) refer to this conflation of terms as a “semantic constellation” but statethat seeing them as distinct and separate is important for analysis. I agree with this but my plea for differentiation goes beyond academic study. There is not a clear division between the theoretical terms, nor a consensus around what such terms mean in practice. This has been highlighted in my own research, where interviews with participants from organizations like Arts Council England, the British Museum, the British Council, and even the British culture ministry have revealed a lack of consensus around terms, concepts, and practices. This has implications for policymakers. For Britain, what the Treasury (finance ministry) thinks it is funding may be different to what the Foreign Office (foreign ministry) thinks it is funding, which may be different to what the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (culture ministry) thinks it is funding, which may be different from what bodies such as the British Council think it is supporting, which may be entirely different to what individual artists, musicians, museums, theatres, and so on have in mind in relation to their own personal objectives and professional agendas. This results in something of a cultural policy conundrum.

And whilst we don’t have a clear sense of these terms in theory, nor in practice, we are now beginning to see the emergence of various subsets of these concepts such as “dance diplomacy”, “gastrodiplomacy”, “yoga diplomacy”, “surfboard diplomacy”, “Twitter diplomacy”, and “digital diplomacy”, to name but a few. These implicitly suggest that there is a role that ordinary citizens can play within International Relations, moving cultural diplomacy away from the formal spaces occupied by political diplomats and ambassadors, to street food stalls, beaches, and teenagers’ bedrooms, for example. “Many-to-many” (rather than “few-to-few” or “few-to-many”) becomes a phrase that is increasingly used, but what does this actually mean in reality? We know that due to globalization and the attendant digital revolution, we live in an increasingly interconnected world where there are multidirectional flows of communication, and that these connections transcend territorial boundaries and enable a plurality of actors and voices to participate. This has its advantages, of course, such as the broader engagement of societies with global concerns, but it also problematizes the issue of soft power and cultural diplomacy, as more voices have the potential to bring dissonance, or a range of views that may go against the consensual visions of politicians. We are just beginning to see how this diffusion of power, facilitated by social media, is playing out.[[6]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn6) Moreover, it raises the question of the role of individual citizens in contributing towards the image and identity of their states? Hill and Beadle (2014:48) declare that soft power is the responsibility of everyone and that we are all part of “the projection of Britain abroad”. In the age of globalization, it would seem, then, that anything and everything could be labeled and understood as cultural diplomacy and soft power, and anyone and everyone is responsible for it. This leads us to the question not of what *is* cultural diplomacy and soft power, as much of the literature continues to wrestle with, but what *isn’t* cultural diplomacy and soft power. This theoretical development has the potential to endanger these concepts, rendering them at best meaningless and at worst obsolete.

All of this is further complicated by the dearth of empirical research in this area. Up to this point in the article, I have not gone into any detail about what the practices of soft power and cultural diplomacy are striving to achieve. The boldest of claims are made, such as reducing the risk of terrorism (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014), enhancing national security (CACI 2009), peace and reconciliation (DCMS 2006), and reversing the erosion of trust (U.S. Department of State 2005). Yet there is absolutely no evidence base to substantiate such claims or back up these assertions. In terms of impact, cultural diplomacy and soft power also suffer from the classic instrumental problem, which is that if they aim to persuade and influence through changing perceptions, then how can a causal link be established? This issue of instrumentalism and causality is much discussed within cultural policy studies (see, for example, Selwood 2006; Belfiore 2006). If causation is near impossible to establish at a community level, then ascertaining whether the perceptions of entire states and the relationships between them have changed appears wholly unfeasible. Added to this is the point that countries do not have collective attitudes, so whose attitudes and perceptions are practices like cultural diplomacy and soft power aiming to change? Politicians? Ordinary citizens? Religious zealots? Those working within soft power and cultural diplomacy initiatives continually fail to make their target audiences clear. Audience reception of cultural diplomacy has been woefully neglected in the literature, with the rare exception of Clarke (2014), who argues that the process of reception needs to be better understood and attended to. Those on the receiving end of cultural diplomacy may well not respond in the way that politicians might expect them to, which flags up the potential for unintended consequences of such activities.

Joseph Nye (2008) tells us that soft power can be measured through focus groups and polling data, so presumably the target of such activity is the general public. How, then, does public opinion lead to changes in foreign policy? International Relations theorist Christopher Layne’s analysis (2010) on the causal mechanisms of soft power is worth reading. He summons considerable empirical evidence to argue that public opinion bears little relationship to policymaking. Furthermore, he argues that it is near impossible to show the connection between soft power activity and changes in foreign policy, and that any shift in policy is more likely the result of hard power activity.

Whilst organizations such as the British Council undertake some evaluation, they rely on quantifiable outcomes like visitor figures and media coverage, rather than on tracking the changes in perceptions and attitudes, or attempting to trace policy developments, over time. Claims of soft power successes can be similarly critiqued. For example, Sandie Dawe, former Chief Executive of the tourism agency VisitBritain, argued that following the Olympic Games in London in 2012, perceptions of Britain changed and that the country began to be seen as more friendly and less stuffy, which resulted in an increase in tourism (You Tube 2013). This may well be the case, but wanting to come to Britain for a holiday is entirely different to the ambitious claims made for soft power such as tackling extremism, as was recently suggested by the British Council (2015). So this is complex and it is no wonder that the issue of measurement is broached within the literature but remains unresolved (see, in addition, Bound et al. 2007; Mark 2010).

This final section has aimed to highlight that there is a credibility issue here, with grand and overblown narratives that may bear little resemblance to the reality on the ground. So this leaves us with a set of problems: there is not a clear understanding or consensus of what soft power and cultural diplomacy are; there is not a clear understanding or consensus of what such practices involve; there is not a clear understanding or consensus of who is responsible for these practices; and there is not a clear understanding or consensus of how effective they are. And yet despite all of this, these amorphous concepts continue to gather global currency and political resources as accepted tools of foreign policy all over the world.

**British Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy**

This article will now move on to analyzing Britain’s approach to cultural diplomacy and soft power. For the last 10 years, Britain has focused on what it called cultural diplomacy, with a strategy that centered on the dual aims of “cooperation” on one hand and “competition” on the other (for a full analysis, see Nisbett 2013a). This notion of “cooperation” is frequently framed within a broader discourse around “post-conflict resolution” (see DCMS 2006, for example), which has primarily focused on the Middle East, following the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan by American and British troops in 2003, and the resulting chaos and instability across the region. Whilst culture undoubtedly has some role to play within post-conflict environments, it raises the question of what this type of activity aims to achieve and whether it can be effective. What hope does cultural diplomacy have if it exists purely to clear up after the messy and unpalatable business of politics? What hope can it have of changing attitudes and perceptions when it follows a bombing campaign that leads to extensive devastation involving civilian fatalities and the decimation of infrastructure? To take the example of Iraq, one consequence of the bombings was that widespread looting occurred across archaeological sites and museums by poverty-stricken locals and organized gangs, fuelling the illicit trade in cultural property, which forms the third largest black market activity in the world after narcotics and firearms. What did cultural diplomacy look like in this case? One initiative by the British Government was to fund the British Museum to send its curators over to Iraq to assist in the clear up mission and help their Middle Eastern counterparts to develop and improve their archival and storage facilities, enabling them to better protect their artefacts in the future and keep track of damage and theft. Aside from the tragic irony, we can immediately see how this type of cultural diplomacy becomes a mere afterthought of dubious geopolitical ambitions.

If cultural diplomacy is about the “things that make people love a country rather than fear it” (British Council 2015), its relationship with a country’s foreign policy is crucial. For example, the propensity of the United States to deploy “hard power”, often through the use of drone strikes, does very little for its global appeal. As the journalist Roula Khalaf (2014:online) remarks, “many people in the Middle East loved US brands and Hollywood movies, and wanted the American dream. None of that, though, could convince them to accept US foreign policy”. There is a wealth of similar examples: China’s record on human rights impedes its national image and Russia’s intervention in and annexation of Crimea and its support for Ukrainian separatist insurgents have an impact on how the world sees it. Another example might be the current refugee crisis sweeping across Europe, with the displacement of 60 million people from war-torn and conflict-ridden countries, and dictatorships across the Middle East and North Africa (which, incidentally, many would argue is the result of Western interventions. The emergence of the extremist militant group Islamic State and the concomitant collapse of Syria due to the civil war can be directly linked to the second Gulf invasion of 2003. See, for example, Chulov 2014). The rest of the world is able to observe the general hostility toward immigrants, with the British government’s response seen by many as slow, inhumane, and inadequate. A significant proportion of British media coverage framed the crisis as economic opportunism, rather than as a matter of life and death. It took a harrowing image of a lifeless child washed up on a beach to spur the government into action and this only happened after large-scale public pressure. Britain’s draconian policies around visas, the growth of Islamophobia, resurgent nationalism, the grappling over “British values”, and the introduction of a new *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015* that will soon require universities to spy on and treat their students as suspects, all help to build a picture internationally about how Britain views foreigners—how we see *ourselves* in relation to *others*, and how we see *our* country in relation to *theirs*. This leads us to consider whether cultural diplomacy is doomed to failure. Is cultural diplomacy persistently undermined by the actions of governments or is cultural diplomacy required to smooth political situations over after the event? Either way, this falls short of what most people would reasonably understand as “cooperation”.

Aside from conflict resolution, Britain has mainly focused on the idea of “competition” within the global marketplace. Culture is used to attract tourists and boost the nation’s wealth, as well as generate income through the export and sale of cultural products on the worldwide market. The British government’s courting of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China[[7]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn7)) is directly related to its aims to use culture as an “aid to trade” (DCMS 2006), and to develop and expand opportunities for commerce with emerging superpowers. Similarly, its apparent disinterest in countries with weak economies, unfortunately referred to as PIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain), further serves to demonstrate its primary interest in sales and export.

Bound et al. (2007:18) lay this out very clearly in arguing that cultural diplomacy is as much “about the quest for the tourist dollar” as it is “the battle for hearts and minds”. The authors assert that the United Kingdom has lost its primacy in manufacturing, sport and politics, but remains a cultural superpower, something that must be taken advantage of if Britain is to be taken seriously on the world stage and remain a global leader. The report devotes a whole chapter to maximizing the UK’s cultural competitive advantage.

These dual notions of competition and cooperation reveal an inherent tension at the very heart of cultural diplomacy. The contradiction is clear. The world is not made up of a community of nations that are compatible and in harmony with one another. Cooperation and competition are not complementary aspects of global order but can be seen as opposing forces. Competition creates winners and losers, which would appear to be at odds with the very essence of cooperation (Nisbett 2013a). Thirty years ago, Mitchell warned against applying notions of competition to cultural relations:

*the result* *would be a competition for cultural markets, a contest between national images, a recrudescence of nineteenth-century cultural nationalism, which would not conduce to understanding and co-operation* (1986:80)

In recent years, Britain has markedly reoriented its efforts away from cultural diplomacy and toward soft power. The term soft power has completely replaced cultural diplomacy, which dominated political discourse over the first 10 years of the millennium and has since entirely dropped out of the rhetoric. Soft power became adopted as a sexy term, forming the basis of a senior government enquiry (House of Lords 2014) as well as advocacy work by the British Academy (Hill and Beadle 2014). The British Council replaced cultural diplomacy with soft power in its new publication *Influence and Attraction: Culture and the Race for Soft Power in the 21st Century* (Holden 2013). But this was more than just a rhetorical shift. In reality, it signaled a turn away from notions of cooperation to a pure focus on competition. The next section of the article will flesh out the significance and implications of this move.

**Soft Power and the Shifting World Order**

Britain’s wholehearted embrace of global competition is perhaps unsurprising, given that the country is governed by one of the most right-wing and hardline Conservative parties in its history. Its efforts are not going unnoticed or unrewarded. In 2015, Britain topped the *Soft Power 30*, an index that claimed to be the most accurate and comprehensive ranking of soft power to date.[[8]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn8) The poll is based on a composite index that brings together objective metrics of countries’ soft power resources (including categories such as culture, enterprise, education, and digital) with subjective international polling data from 7,000 people across 20 countries. Brazil came in at number 23, and both Russia and India failed to make it into the rankings. China came last place at number 30, presumably due to its media censorship and restrictions. This is intriguing, especially considering the fact that China is four times as wealthy as Britain, 20 times as populous, and 40 times bigger in scale. The index also showed countries that have historically been powerful—such as Portugal, France, and Spain—in the top half of the table.

The periodical *Monocle* recently released the results of its 2014–2015 survey of soft power. In its league table, also of 30 countries, it positioned the United Kingdom in third place, after Germany in second, and the United States in first. The survey, in collaboration with the UK think tank the Institute for Government, as the key to securing the top spot. This was Monocle’s fifth annual poll and is consistent with its previous surveys in that western nations continue to dominate (Monocle 2013).[[9]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn9)

Similarly, in 2015, the *Institute for Urban Strategies* at *The Mori Memorial Foundation* in Tokyo published the *Global Power City Index*, a comprehensive study that aims to measure a city’s “strength” according to its “magnetism”, described as its power to attract creative individuals and business enterprises from across the world and to mobilize its assets. The index evaluated and ranked 40 major global cities, based on six categories including the “economy”, “livability”, and “cultural interaction”, and 70 indicators such as “artists” and “visitors”. London secured first place (holding its position since 2012), followed by New York (formerly at number one in 2011), and then Paris (which has remained in third place since 2008).[[10]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn10) Indices such as these may render inaccurate the accusation by the Russian President Vladimir Putin that Britain is a “small island no one listens to” (Kirkup 2013:2). On the contrary, Britain has enormous global clout in the cultural realm, which can be seen to be entirely disproportionate to its size.

Despite Britain topping the soft power polls, it has been doing less well in global economic indices. It was recently reported that despite the country’s financial market being one of the most developed in the world, Britain had dropped to 10th place (below Sweden, to the consternation of many commentators) in the *Annual Global Competitive Index* in 2015, carried out by the World Economic Forum think tank. This index assesses the world’s economies across more than 100 indicators, from the quality of infrastructure to the flexibility of labor markets. Whilst Britain was found to be strong with regards to its institutions, scientific research, and digital technologies, it was weak in terms of the instability of its public finances. The report stated that it will have to “improve its macroeconomic environment” (Schwab 2015:25), where it came 108th out of 140 countries due to the high government deficit and public debt, which has doubled since 2007.

So whilst it is widely accepted that economic and political power is unequivocally shifting away from the West, cultural power seems to remain firmly fixed and rooted. I would like to suggest that Britain’s influence is inextricably bound up in its history, which has an impact on its resources, scale of production and dissemination, reputation, and so on. Polls such as those cited here seem to be just as much of an indication of resources than a measure of impact or progress. The fact that the traditionally powerful countries excel in cultural diplomacy and soft power is to be expected. These countries have accrued assets and have developed physical infrastructure such as ports, airports, railways, and, more recently, information technology and communications, which are inextricably linked to their imperial pasts and accumulated from centuries of exploitation. The threads of empire ensure a rich network of global cultural and economic connections, which not only cements their place in the soft power arena, but enables these countries to continue to culturally dominate. Some may explain this very simply as “neocolonialism”, a term that was coined in reference to global capitalist imperialism after World War II but has since been extended and expanded. It describes the economic and cultural pressure by traditionally powerful countries to control or influence others, especially former dependents or less developed countries (Young 1991). The United States is the obvious example here and an interesting one in that it continues to dominate entire regions of the globe both economically and culturally, and yet has never been an imperial power or held control of a territory in any physical sense.[[11]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn11)

While the British government promotes the idea of soft power (House of Lords 2014), it has cut many funding streams related to it due to the global economic downturn, which has had an impact on large swathes of the world. For example, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the British Council and many national museums (Hill and Beadle 2014). These cuts are not insubstantial. In 2010, the FCO and DCMS’s budget was each reduced by 24 percent in real terms (HM Treasury 2010). These were further cut by 6.3 and 7 percent, respectively, in 2013 (HM Treasury 2013). The British Council’s grant reduced by £150 million between 2010 and 2015, a cut of 26 percent in real terms (House of Commons 2013). The BBC World Service was cut by 16 percent, which meant making £50 million of savings from its international broadcasting operations (Plunkett 2011).

However, soft power resources have been channeled into new areas.[[12]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn12) For example, one current success story is the “Britain is GREAT” promotion. This is a £100 million, four-year tourism campaign that began in 2011 to maximize opportunities around the Olympic Games held in London in 2012. It focuses on a number of themes: culture, heritage, countryside, shopping, food, and sport. To date, it has generated £2.5 billion in income through tourism. *VisitBritain*, the tourism organization which ran the campaign, found itself at the center of Britain’s soft power effort, firmly establishing marketing, public relations, nation branding, and advertising as its key components. The campaign is overseen by the Department for Trade and Industry, which further serves to demonstrate the wholesale reorientation of soft power into the realm of business. VisitBritain’s former Chief Executive, Sandie Dawe, recently discussed how much work Britain needed to do in terms of its soft power. Market research had revealed that people polled in China could name eight to ten French and Italian brands but only one British brand. She saw this as an indication of France having a stronger reputation for luxury goods and shopping, and that Britain could and should be doing more to compete (Dance Umbrella 2015).

Due to the lack of specificity in both Milton C. Cummings and Joseph Nye’s original conceptualizations of cultural diplomacy and soft power, respectively, it is not straightforward to claim that these terms have moved away from their original definitions, as Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015) may be suggesting. It is perhaps more accurate to argue that soft power has engulfed cultural diplomacy and has developed in parallel with global changes over the three decades since the term was coined. The rendering of soft power as straightforwardly being about competition, and the embrace and success of it could be seen as a logical outcome of the rise and spread of Western corporations, building on the foundations of traditional hierarchies of power and domination. This firmly goes against Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015), who argue that cultural diplomacy needs to be seen in the context of the changing architecture of international relations, taking the changing role of the nation state due to globalization and geopolitics into account. I would argue that cultural diplomacy and its attendant connections with intercultural understanding has been folded into the far broader concept of soft power, which has consistently developed in line with and alongside all of these changes. Cultural diplomacy been usurped by the far more corporate-friendly soft power and has become wholly about capital, competition, and consumption. Soft power, which is about persuasion, presumably through competitive means, centers on global markets. This focus on free trade seems to be at odds with the spirit of cultural diplomacy and cultural relations, with any sense of the exchange of ideas or the fostering of mutual understanding being lost or abandoned along the way. The term soft power is inadequate if we judge it on its ability or potential to provide a space for harmonious cooperation. Yet, if we see it in the context of creeping neoliberalism, it simply becomes merely another conduit for trade.

At the time of writing this article, Britain is enjoying a state visit by the Chinese President. Academic Nicholas Kitchen (2015:online) has argued that this trip was not organized by the Foreign Office, but by the Treasury, in a bid for “short-term mercantilism”. Similarly, according to Graham Sheffield, Director of Arts at the British Council, for the first time, politicians went straight to the hard negotiation and completely bypassed the “arm’s length” bodies[[13]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn13) such as the cultural organizations (Dance Umbrella 2015), which in the past have provided more neutral contexts and a softer means of doing business. This signals a shift in the way that culture is viewed and used within the realm of International Relations. This direct approach appears to have paid off, with the brokering of a range of creative and technology partnerships between the United Kingdom and China worth £325 million. However, Kitchen (2015) claims that this emphasis on commercial interests runs the risk of Britain being seen merely as a trade promotion service, which is only interested in boosting exports, rather than as diplomatic in the more traditional sense.

This notion of economic dominance speaks to a tension at the very core of cultural diplomacy, which Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015) rightly point out. If soft power or cultural diplomacy act only in the interests of a nation state, this is likely to be at odds with promoting a harmonious international order for the benefit of all countries. What is in the national interest may well be in opposition to what is in the interest of other nations. The authors therefore refer to cultural diplomacy as a “struggle for national cultural ascendancy”, which is not “helpful in improving international cultural relations” (2015:374). This friction between the national interest and common (or universal) interest is largely not acknowledged, nor addressed, by the literature or by those who work in this field. This prompts Ang, Isar, and Mar (2015) to ask the question of whether cultural diplomacy can go beyond the national interest. For Britain, cultural diplomacy seems to be of less interest than soft power, and if we accept the rules of the game in terms of the free market economy, then we also accept the inequality that will inevitably result.

The final section of this article explores how we might make sense of this in light of what is going on in the world at present. As I have touched upon in this piece, it is widely recognized that the world order is shifting. This is in response to a range of interlocking factors including globalization, the spread of neoliberalism, seismic economic change, migration and the mass movement of people, increasing cosmopolitanism, a growing middle class and technological advancement, to name but a few. These factors in combination have created the conditions for countries in the East and Global South to emerge as the powerhouses of the future. Implicit within this shift are questions around the significance of countries that are not in the running to become world leaders, as well as the superpowers of yesteryear. Aside from the soft power indices, Britain, for example, is undoubtedly less important globally than it was 50, 100, 200, or 400 years ago. Relinquishing that power is not easy, especially for a country that displayed the kind of audacity required to pull off the British Empire, which, at its height, covered 14 million square miles of physical territory and 450 million people, one quarter of the world’s population at that time. Yet in the cultural sphere, Britain still enjoys a competitive advantage over most other countries in the world. We can see, then, that through its culture, it is able to cling on to some aspects of its power and influence in an attempt to replicate the imperial greatness that it once had but has since lost.

This influence is maximized by the British government and by multinational corporate organizations in terms of sales and exports. A recent report on the creative industries (BOP 2016), featured data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. It showed that the United Kingdom exported more creative goods per capita than any other country in the world. The United Kingdom exported $361 per head, followed by Germany ($328), France $305, and the United States ($234) in fourth place. Prime Minister David Cameron was delighted by the growth of the creative economy:

*Britain has huge creative clout around the world … From Asia to America, they’re dancing to our music, watching our films and wearing our designers’ latest creations* (Burn-Callander 2016).

This power is also enjoyed by some of Britain’s cultural organizations as well. For example, my previous study of national museums in Britain found that the key motivation for these institutions to work internationally was income generation (Nisbett 2013b). One way of doing this is to tour exhibitions internationally, where host institutions pay a premium. Another means is to loan artefacts and artworks to institutions abroad. Berlin’s Gemäldegalerie is reported to have raised €1 million by lending two paintings by the Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer to museums in Japan, whilst the Picasso Museum in Paris raised €30 million from lending works to museums abroad. The director of Amsterdam’s Van Gogh Museum boasted that he had “a list as long as his arm of foreign museums clamouring to borrow some of his most famous paintings” (Rocco 2013:online). It is due to the traditional power structures that these institutions were able to acquire and accrue these treasures in the first place. They did so through a variety of means: everything from straightforward financial transactions (for example, the Elgin Marbles) through to violent and punitive missions (for example, the Benin Bronzes). Today’s art historians, operating within the context of “new museology” (Ross 2004), continue to assert that these traditional hierarchies are being questioned, yet the very fact that that the “Old Masters” remain highly sought after perpetuates an artistic canon that is heavily skewed to the Western world, thanks to the cultural and intellectual legacy of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the interplay of key factors such as colonialism and imperialism.

Far more recently, we have observed the growth of consultancy, another means by which western museums can enjoy their dominance and boost their income. According to *The Economist*, the British Museum charges £10 million a year to provide consultancy services to the Zayed National Museum in Abu Dhabi, set to open later this year (Rocco 2013). In another example, we can see how museums franchise their names and brands for financial profit. The Louvre has charged $525 million to attach its name to a new museum in Abu Dhabi. According to scholar Btihaj Ajana, this is a “strong attestation as to how ‘big name’ institutions are increasingly mobilizing the power of their cultural brands and reputation for financial gain” (2015:328). This amounts to unabashed profiteering that is only possible due to deeply entrenched power structures.

There are also perhaps less explicit examples of the exercising of Western power within the international cultural realm. Before bringing this article to a close, I would like to briefly return to the previous example of the delegation of British curators who travelled to Iraq to assist in the clean-up operation following the 2003 invasion. Within my own empirical research, the museum professionals that I interviewed told me how the curators had helped to improve the archiving, record-keeping, and storage systems in Iraq. They saw this straightforwardly as showing the Iraqis how to do things “better” and “properly”—the idea here being that if they didn’t keep proper records, then how would they know what had been stolen or damaged in the future? Putting the obvious irony to one side, I was struck by how these comments verged, at points, on the assumption that the British way of doing these things was the best way of doing them. Such ethnocentrism is not unusual, as people tend to see their culturally influenced values, beliefs, and attitudes as “normal”, often superior and the “right” way of doing things. Yet, paradoxically, the development of “new museology” since the 1990s has instilled museum professionals with a greater reflexivity, meaning that they are now all the more aware of the place their organizations occupy in the world and the complexity of relationships between institutions, artefacts, and audiences. Nevertheless, the examples in this section demonstrate how soft power can serve to replicate and reinforce the traditional and existing power structures.

**Conclusions**

In this article, I have explored the terms and concepts of soft power and cultural diplomacy from a theoretical perspective as well as thinking about how these terms manifest in practice. Much of the discussion within the academic literature has thus far been preoccupied with the distinctions between terms, along with the related concepts of cultural relations and propaganda. I have attempted to move this discussion on, to consider how cultural diplomacy and soft power are understood within the contemporary world and to contextualize these terms through a broader sociological and political lens.

I have implicitly shown that the scholarly debates are largely immaterial, as they have become locked into circular, theoretical discussions, rather than paying attention to how states and governments understand and practice soft power and cultural diplomacy today. These terms are rarely subjected to empirical scrutiny and this is reflected in the literature. By focusing on the British approach, I have explained how cultural diplomacy as both a term and a practice (with its contradictory dynamics of “cooperation” and “competition”) has been replaced by the more market-friendly soft power. The adoption of this term and its subsequent development has simply become absorbed within the context of the free market economy.

Soft power has always involved the export of cultural goods, of course. For example, The Beatles, once referred to as the Prime Minister’s “secret weapon” received an MBE (a distinguished medal awarded by the Queen in recognition of contributions to the arts and sciences) for their “services to export” (British Broadcasting Corporation 2015). This was connected to the “British invasion”, which refers to the phenomenon in the 1960s where British musicians and popular music gained enormous popularity in the United States (ironically by rehashing American black music such as rock and roll, and blues). So, none of this is new. However, due to globalization and the accompanying stronghold that neoliberalism has across the globe, with the rise of Western corporate power, the growth of the Internet and shifting patterns of cultural production and consumption, soft power has transcended mere influence to become a significant factor in a state’s ability to generate income and boost its wealth. Any notions of intercultural understanding and cooperation have been at best, forgotten, and at worst, abandoned.

I have also argued that, to a large extent, soft power can be bought. The trajectory of world history means that the wealthy western nations will always have the monopoly on soft power, since they have long established networks of influence, an infrastructure that enables vast cultural production, and the longstanding and proven channels through which these cultural goods can be distributed across the world. This means that soft power is simply a way of renewing, refreshing, and replicating existing power structures. It is one of the remaining weapons through which traditionally powerful nations can attempt to resist or slow down the shifting world order. It has become a means by which the existing hegemony can be reimagined, repackaged, and reaffirmed.

*The featured image is* [*Carrousel Form II, 1969 by Sam Gilliam.*](http://africanah.org/collection-sam-gilliam/)

References

[[1]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref1) Examples of States that have managed to withstand neoliberal pressure are scarce. Uruguay is an unusually successful case where neoliberalism has been resisted yet the country has attained both economic growth *and* equitable distribution through its social policies that ensure that its citizens get access to adequate education, health, housing, and employment. See David Harvey’s (2005) seminal work for a comprehensive analysis and discussion of neoliberalism.

[[2]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref2) See Frances Stonor-Saunders’s book *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (2000) for a detailed examination of the covert funding of art and culture by America’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

[[3]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref3) It is worth noting here that there is some variation in the understanding of the term “propaganda”. Etymologically, it comes from the notion of propagation and was originally a neutral term that was frequently used for the social good (for example, to encourage people to vote or for public health recommendations). In the West, it now has negative connotations due to dubious practices by dominant aggressive states, yet it remains in use as a neutral term in countries like China.

[[4]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref4) For a lively account of this event, including sound bites from Edward Bernays, please see part one of a documentary film series entitled *The Century of the Self* by British filmmaker Adam Curtis.

[[5]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref5) Many thanks to the peer reviewer of this paper for their insistence on the need for more discussion of the complexities of world politics.

[[6]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref6) A good example of this is the *Black Lives Matter* movement. This began with a group of activists in the United States, who were campaigning against institutionalized racism in the form of police brutality against African Americans. This action was prompted by a number of fatal shootings of (often young, often unarmed) black citizens by white police officers. The movement began as a hashtag on Twitter and through the use of social media, has now gained international recognition and a global following. It continues to make a vital contribution to the image of the United States across the world in relation to its structural inequality, race relations, and social injustice. These are not only American problems, of course. The *Black Lives Matter* movement has crucially connected the struggle of black people worldwide, demonstrating a pattern that transcends national borders and crosses entire continents (Thrasher 2015). It has been hailed as the twenty-first-century civil rights movement (Day 2015) and is an example of how the voices of ordinary people can go against or undermine the official messages transmitted by governments and states, and directly influence how nations are seen and understood by the rest of the world.

[[7]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref7) Although Russia is listed as a BRIC country, it has an ambivalent relationship with Britain and is viewed and treated differently from China, India, and Brazil. At the time of writing this article in October 2015, there was a state visit from the Chinese president, which saw politicians positively fawning over Xi Jinping with numerous red carpet events, processions in gold carriages, lavish banquets, and even a sleepover at the Queen’s residence, Buckingham Palace. All of this formed a backdrop for negotiating collaborative partnerships and trade deals. It is hard to imagine the Russian President Vladimir Putin receiving such a warm welcome.

[[8]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref8) The *Soft Power 30* was compiled by the London-based PR firm Portland, in collaboration with Facebook and the market research consultancy ComRes. See <http://softpower30.portland-communications.com/pdfs/the_soft_power_30.pdf>.

[[9]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref9) See <http://monocle.com/film/affairs/soft-power-survey-2014-15/>.

[[10]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref10) See <http://www.mori-m-foundation.or.jp/english/ius2/gpci2/>.

[[11]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref11) The term neocolonialism is frequently applied to countries that seek to exploit the natural resources of other countries. Additionally, this raises the question of how poor countries will ever compete in the global arena. In the controversial documentary *Enjoy Poverty* (2008), Dutch artist Renzo Martens takes an epic journey to the Republic of the Congo, where he argues that poverty is the country’s most lucrative resource, exceeding income from traditional exports like gold, diamonds, or cocoa. These raw materials are indeed cultural goods but whilst they are in high demand globally, they are not components of soft power in that they do not attract tourists or creative workers, nor bring money into local communities, and any foreign investment is purely tied to extraction, export, and exploitation. Arguably, it is countries like the Republic of Congo that are most in need of soft power and the commercial benefits it may bring.

[[12]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref12) The current British Conservative government has been frequently and consistently accused of making ideological cuts in order to “shrink the State”, rather than make cuts that reflect real financial necessity to reduce the deficit. Cutting the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and British Council would fit this charge.

[[13]](http://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref13) Arm’s length bodies, such as Arts Council England, are those that are funded by the government and which distribute public funding to other cultural organizations. These bodies remain separate from government so that direct decisions are made by so-called experts, rather than by politicians, in order to preserve professional standards and prevent political interference.

Bibliography

Ajana, Btihaj. (2015) Branding, Legitimation and the Power of Museums: The Case of the Louvre. *Museum and Society* 13 (3): 322-341.

Ang, Ien, Yudhishthir Raj Isar, and Phillip Mar. (2015) Cultural Diplomacy: Beyond the National Interest? *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21 (4): 365-381.

Bachrach, Peter, and Morton S. Baratz. (1962) Two Faces of Power. *The American Political Science Review* 56 (4): 947-952.

Belfiore, Eleonora. (2006) The Social Impacts of the Arts—Myth or Reality? In *Culture Vultures. Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?*, ed. Munira Mirza, 20-37. London: Policy Exchange.

Belfiore, Eleonora. (2002) Art as a Means of Alleviating Social Exclusion: Does it Really Work? A Critique of Instrumental Cultural Policies and Social Impact Studies in the UK. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 8 (1): 91-106.

BOP Consulting. (2016) *Leading the World? The UK and the “Global Arts Race”*. London: Creative Industries Federation.

Bound, Kirsten, Rachel Briggs, Holden John, and Sam Jones. (2007) *Cultural Diplomacy—Culture is a Central Component of International Relations. It’s Time to Unlock its Full Potential*. London: Demos.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc Wacquant. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Limited.

Brademas, John. (2009) Moving Forward: A Renewed Role for American Arts and Artists in the Global Age. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society* 39 (4): 305-315.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. (2006) Using *Thematic Analysis* in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77-101.

British Broadcasting Corporation. (2013) *Guide to the Syrian Rebels*. <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24403003>(Accessed](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-24403003%3E%28Accessed) 7 February 2016).

British Broadcasting Corporation. (2015) *Let Us Entertain You. Episode Two: The New British Empire*. BBC 2.

British Council. (2015) How Soft Power Can Help Meet International Challenges*.* <[https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/insight/how-soft-power-can-help-meet-international-challenges&gt](https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/insight/how-soft-power-can-help-meet-international-challenges%26gt); (Accessed 18 November 2015).

Burn-Callander, Rebecca. (2016) Creative Industries are ‘Driving Force’ of UK Economy. *The Telegraph*, January 20. <[http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/yourbusiness/12110614/Creative-industries-are-driving-force-of-UK-economy-says-David-Cameron.html&gt](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/yourbusiness/12110614/Creative-industries-are-driving-force-of-UK-economy-says-David-Cameron.html%26gt); (Accessed 12 February 2016).

CACI. (2009) *Dealing With Today’s Asymmetric Threat to U.S. and Global Security: Soft Power*. Virginia: CACI International Inc.

Channick, Joan. (2005) The Artist as Cultural Diplomat. *American Theatre* 22 (5): 4.

Charmaz, Kathy. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory—A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. London: Sage.

Chulov, Martin. (2014) Isis: The Inside Story. *The Guardian*, December 11. <[http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/-sp-isis-the-inside-story&gt](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/dec/11/-sp-isis-the-inside-story%26gt); (Accessed 18 November 2015).

Clarke, David. (2014) Theorising the Role of Cultural Products in Cultural Diplomacy from a Cultural Studies Perspective. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*. DOI:10.1080/10286632.2014.958481.

Cummings, Milton C. (2003) *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*. Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture.

Curtis, Adam. (2002) *The Century of the Self*. BBC Two.

Dahl, Robert. (1961) *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dance Umbrella. (2015) Power or Persuasion? Art and Culture as a Tool in International Politics. <<http://danceumbrella.co.uk/event.php?ref=body-politic-2015#.VjEk_mThDZv&gt>; (Accessed 28 October 2015).

Day, Elizabeth. (2015) #BlackLivesMatter: the Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement. *The Observer*, July 19. <[http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement&gt](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement%26gt); (Accessed 28 October 2015).

Department for Culture, Media and Sport. (2006) *International Strategy*. London: DCMS.

Dexter Lord, Gail, and Ngaire Blankenberg, eds. (2015) *Cities, Museums and Soft Power*. Washington: The AAM Press.

Finn, Helena K. (2003) The Case for Cultural Diplomacy: Engaging Foreign Audiences. *Foreign Affairs* 82 (6): 15-20.

Glaser, Barney G., and Anselm L. Strauss. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine.

Gould-Davies, Nigel. (2003) The Logic of Soviet Cultural Diplomacy. *Diplomatic History* 27 (2): 193-214.

Gray, Clive. (2007) Commodification and Instrumentality in Cultural Policy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 13 (2): 203-215.

Hall, Stuart. (2011) The Neo-liberal Revolution. *Cultural Studies* 25 (6): 705-728.

Hamelink, Cees J. (1999) The Elusive Concept of Globalisation. *Global Dialogue* 1 (1): 1-9.

Harvey, David. (2005) *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hicks, Colin. (2007) Wealth from Creativity: Insights and Strategies for the Future of International Cultural Relations. *Futures: The Journal of Policy, Planning and Futures Studies* 39 (10): 1223-1233.

Hill, Christopher, and Sarah Beadle. (2014) *The Art of Attraction: Soft Power and the UK’s Role in the World*. London: British Academy.

HM Treasury. (2010) *Spending Review 2010, Cm 7942*. London: The Stationery Office Limited.

HM Treasury. (2013) *Spending Round 2013, Cm 8639*. London: The Stationery Office Limited.

Holden, John. (2013) *Influence and Attraction: Culture and the Race for Soft Power in the 21st Century*. London: British Council.

House of Commons. (2007) Archive. <www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070313/halltext/70313h0006.htm> (Accessed 20 October 2015).

House of Commons. (2013) Foreign Affairs Committee—Fifth Report.

FCO Performance and Finances. (2011–12). <[http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmfaff/690/69012.htm&gt](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmfaff/690/69012.htm%26gt); (Accessed 28 October 2015).

House of Lords. (2014) *Select Committee Report on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence: Persuasion and Power in the Modern World*. UK Parliament.

Iriye, Akira. (1997) *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Keith, Kenton W. (2009) The Crisis in U.S Cultural Representation Abroad or Where’s My Cultural Attaché?! *The Journal of Arts Management, Law and Society*. 39 (4): 289-292.

Kennedy, Liam. (2003) Remembering September 11: Photography as Cultural Diplomacy. *International Affairs*. 79 (2): 315-326.

Khalaf, Roula. (2014) Shifts and Shocks on the Soft Power Scale. *Financial Times*, December 10. <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/bc5bbda0-7ee8-11e4-a828-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3pu0ZGGcL&gt>; (Accessed 28 October 2015).

Kirkup, James. (2013) Russia Mocks Britain, the Little Island. *The Daily Telegraph*, September 6.

Kitchen, Nicholas. (2015) Instead of Cosying up to China, Britain Should Start Investing for Influence. *London School of Economics*. <[http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/britain-should-start-investing-for-influence&gt](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/britain-should-start-investing-for-influence%26gt); (Accessed 15 December 2015).

Layne, Christopher. (2010) The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power. In *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy—Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Inderjeet Parmar, and Michael Cox, 51-82. Oxon: Routledge.

Lukes, Steven. (1974) *Power: A Radical View*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mark, Simon L. (2010) Rethinking Cultural Diplomacy: The Cultural Diplomacy of New Zealand, the Canadian Federation and Quebec. *Political Science* 62 (1): 62-83.

Martens, Renzo. (2008) *Enjoy Poverty, Episode III*. Renzo Martens Menselijke Activiteiten.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2014) *The Role of Diplomacy and Soft Power in Combatting Terrorism*. Ankara: Center for Strategic Research.

Mirowski, Philip, and Dieter Plehwe. eds. (2009) *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Mirza, Munira. ed. (2006) *Culture Vultures. Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* London: Policy Exchange.

Mitchell, John M. (1986) *International Cultural Relations*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Nisbett, Melissa. (2013a) Protection, Survival and Growth: An Analysis of International Policy Documents. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 19 (1): 84-102.

Nisbett, Melissa. (2013b) New Perspectives on Instrumentalism: An Empirical Study of Cultural Diplomacy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 19 (5): 557-575.

Nye, Joseph S. (1990) *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Powe*r. New York: Basic Books.

Nye, Joseph S. (2002) *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nye, Joseph S. (2004) *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.

Nye, Joseph S. (2008) Public Diplomacy and Soft Power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (1): 94-109.

Nye, Joseph S. (2010) The Future of Soft Power in US Foreign Policy. In *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy—Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Inderjeet Parmar, and Michael Cox, 4-11. Oxon: Routledge.

Parmar, Inderjeet, and Michael Cox. eds. (2010) *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy—Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Oxon: Routledge.

Parsons, Anthony. (1985) “Vultures and Philistines”: British Attitudes to Culture and Cultural Diplomacy. *International Affairs* 61 (1): 1-8.

Pasha, Mustapha Kamal. (2001) Liberalization, State Patronage and the “New Inequality” in South Asia. In *Critical Perspectives on Globalization and Neoliberalism in the Developing Countries*, eds. Richard L. Harris, and Melinda J. Seid, 71-86. Boston: Brill Publishing.

Plunkett, John. (2011) BBC World Service to “cut up to 650 jobs”. *The Guardian*, January 26. <[http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jan/25/bbc-world-service-jobs&gt](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/jan/25/bbc-world-service-jobs%26gt); (Accessed 28 October 2015).

Portland, Facebook, and ComRes. (2015) Soft Power 30. <[http://softpower30.portland-communications.com/pdfs/the\_soft\_power\_30.pdf&gt](http://softpower30.portland-communications.com/pdfs/the_soft_power_30.pdf%26gt); (Accessed 28 October 2015).

Reeves, Julie. (2007) *Culture and International Relations*, *Narratives, Natives and Tourists*. London: Routledge.

Rocco, Fiammetta. (2013) Temples of Delight. *The Economist*, December 21. <[http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21591707-museums-world-over-are-doing-amazingly-well-says-fiammetta-rocco-can-they-keep&gt](http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21591707-museums-world-over-are-doing-amazingly-well-says-fiammetta-rocco-can-they-keep%26gt); (Accessed 28 October 2015).

Ross, Max. (2004) Interpreting the New Museology. *Museum and Society* 2 (2): 84-103.

Sader, Emir. (2008) The Weakest Link? Neoliberalism in Latin America. *New Left Review* 52: 5-31.

Saeki, Chizuru. (2005) The Perry Centennial Celebration: A Case Study in US–Japanese Cultural Diplomacy. *International Social Science Review* 80 (3/4): 137-150.

Schneider, Cynthia P. (2010) Cultural Diplomacy: The Humanizing Factor. In *International Cultural Policies and Power*, ed. J. P Singh, 101-112. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schwab, Klaus. (2015) *The Global Competitiveness Report 2014–2015*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.

Selwood, Sara. (2006) Unreliable evidence: The Thetorics of Data Collection in the Cultural Sector. In *Culture Vultures. Is UK Arts Policy Damaging the Arts?* ed. Munira Mirza, 38-52. London: Policy Exchange.Siddiqui

Stonor-Saunders, Frances. (2000) *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*. London: Granta.

Thrasher, Steven W. (2015) Black Lives Matter Has Showed Us: The Oppression of Black People is Borderless. *The Guardian*, August 9. <[http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/09/black-lives-matter-movement-taught-black-oppression-borderless-michael-brown&gt](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/09/black-lives-matter-movement-taught-black-oppression-borderless-michael-brown%26gt); (Accessed 28 October 2015).

U.S. Department of State. (2005) *Cultural Diplomacy The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy*. Washington: Department of State.

Vaughan, James R. (2005) A Certain Idea of Britain: British Cultural Diplomacy in the Middle East 1945–57. *Contemporary British History* 19 (2): 151-168.

Vickers, Rhiannon. (2004) The New Public Diplomacy: Britain and Canada Compared. ***British Journal of Politics and International Relations*** 6 (2): 182-194.

Young, Robert J. C. (1991) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Neocolonialism and the Secret Agent of Knowledge: An Interview with Robert J.C. Young. *Oxford Literary Review* 13: 220-251.

You Tube. (2013) Interview with Sandie Dawe, Chief Executive of VisitBritain, Annual Review 2012/2013. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vgQQRDPB-8&gt>; (Accessed 26 October 2015).