Conflict is understood and experienced through both the head and the heart. The head translates conflict in a logical manner: statistics, dates, important people, important places, and important battles. However, logic and reason only take a person so far; the heart must compensate for the rest. What cannot be understood through books and facts must instead be communicated through truths and emotions. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a daily struggle of resilience now manifesting itself in a third intifada, a struggle that is emerging as a cultural movement. Learning from the first and second intifadas, which were characterized by politics and violence, this current movement is about rebuilding homes, lives, villages, families, international and individual identities. Most importantly, it is highlighted through various art movements.

Art is a way to connect with Palestinian identity, to nonviolently channel frustrations, and to individually and collectively resist the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Art is a way to cope with past trauma, almost therapeutically. Art is a nonviolent umbrella tool for action. It challenges the foundations of oppression, and power hierarchies. It is a language spoken beyond borders and boundaries. Art engages the heart, and expresses the human side of conflict. Art challenges the stifling silence.

However, before understanding the specifics of a possible third “cultural” intifada in Palestine, the power of culture must first be adequately understood within the context of conflict. Then, coupled with the general emerging themes of such a resistance movement, one can finally begin to roughly sketch the outline for
what exactly a “cultural” intifada would entail. While every protest movement generates various specific themes, it is the individuals and groups within these dynamic communities that define the movement. The movement does not define them.

Palestinian-born scholar and the father of ‘orientalism,’ Edward Said, stressed the need for a “process of reaffirming the power of culture over the culture of power” as a theme in much of his resistance writing. This notion seems especially applicable to the emergence of a unified Palestinian cultural resistance movement. Webster’s Dictionary defines culture as “the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time.” Yet Mitri Rahed, a Bethlehem community activist and Palestinian Christian pastor, breaths life into the Webster’s definition in his essay “Culture as the Art of Breathing.” For Rahed, culture is about strength, the soul, and spiritual sustenance,

| culture is the art that enables the soul not only to survive, but to thrive. Culture is the art that enables one to resist being perceived only as a victim. Culture is the art of becoming an actor…. It is the art of celebrating life in a context that is still dominated by forces of death and domination – the art of resisting creatively and nonviolently.” (Rahed 17) |

Cultural identity is a crucial component of a larger identity formulation process on both individual and collective levels. Within the context of a Palestinian resistance movement, culture has to do with self-determination. It acts as a medium through which Palestinians can shift in a positive direction the ignorant and generalized international discourse regarding their “inherently violent nature” in the wake of the Second Intifada. Culture is a form of expression different from that of religious rhetoric and political semantics. Culture is about personal and collective control; according to Rahed “what Palestine needs are ambassadors of its culture who can express the unique spirit of the land and its people. Culture is the means that empowers us to give a face to our [community], to write melodies to our narrative, and to develop an identity that, like an olive tree, is deeply rooted in the Palestinian soil, yet whose branches reach out into the open skies”. (Rahed 18) The power behind this cultural intifada lies in its ability to close factional divisions within various communities and create a stronger, more unified Palestinian identity. Culture acts as a foundation on which the resistance movement can be more securely built.

The Second Intifada, in the early 2000’s, was characterized in popular international discourse by its frustrated, violent and chaotic nature – such characteristics were then applied to generalize collective Palestinian identity. These generalizations were subsequently over-exposed in popular American and Israeli media as a means of generating support and justifying the continuation of the occupation and the construction of the Separation Wall through portions of the West Bank. The identity formation process is a largely reciprocal phenomenon as much as it is an internal struggle, and “there is a need to be recognized by others in one’s own identity and to recognize others in their own identities” (Piquard 114). The violence that erupted during the Second Intifada cast a dark shadow over external Palestinian identity formulations. The international community branded this guerilla style of resistance as “terrorism” during an already tense period of interactions between the geopolitical West and the Middle East. The number of martyrs during the Second Intifada led to internal reflection among Palestinian communities as well: surely there had to be a better method of resistance than Palestinians killing themselves in the name of national sacrifice. Culture is increasingly used to fill the void left in the wake of such feelings of hopelessness, since “culture is the art of sustaining one’s breath…culture is the art of learning how to breathe normally. In contexts of conflict, people concentrate mainly on those who ‘kill the body’, but often forget about those who ‘kill the soul’, i.e. the dignity, creativity, and vision of people.” (Rahed 16) The uniqueness of the cultural resistance movement is its ability to create a cohesive vision for Palestinian nationalism, which challenges occupiers and current international perceptions. According to Abdelfattah Abusrour, a Palestinian youth organizer and nonviolent activist:

| We [do not] want to continue to reproduce the same stereotypical images that are diffused in the media and that represent Palestinians as only capable of throwing stones or responding only by violence to all the violence imposed on them…the arts in general, and theatre, in particular, are very powerful means of expression and effective methods of change at the level of the individual and the community (Abusrour 90). |
Strength. Education. Resilience. Passion. Hospitality. Vitality. Generosity. Children. These are words that Palestinians themselves choose to represent their values. There are undoubtedly less inspiring words, applied by others; however, these descriptions are complicated by the geopolitical situation of the Middle East.

The power of a resistance movement built upon shared Palestinian culture lies in its ability to unify and foster a sense of national belonging. Culture transcends and develops over time into specific customs and traditions within a larger Palestinian heritage; this vision is built upon a series of agreed upon and accepted communal truths. These truths are carefully preserved, passed down through oral histories – generation to generation – in a deliberate effort to retain the personal ‘human’ experiences of elders. These narratives aren’t about factually accurate accounts, but rather are the various extensive personal experiences of individuals, families, and communities: “[Knowledge] is not just about learning. It is about the flow of information. Connecting those who possess information, with those who want [it]” (Prineas 136). The challenge lies in what to take away from – and what to do with – this information. Frequently, knowledge can bring more frustration, fear, depression and insecurity than ignorance, “since they [the Palestinian youth] concluded that this country has always been under different occupations and that each one was worse than the other” (Atallah 99). However if hope exists, it is most present in the promise, passion, and persistence of the young, who are the authors of the Palestinian future.

Scribbled across the Separation Wall near the entrance to the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem, in thick red spray-paint, someone wrote “we are writing history with our own actions.” This rings out as a Gandhian reminder than the ends do not justify the means, as illustrated through the still painful losses during the Second Intifada. It is not the frustration and anger felt by Palestinians towards the Israeli Occupation that is problematic, but rather the means through which that frustration manifests itself. Anger is healthy, but powerful, and should be used constructively: “People have the right to be angry and express their anger. It’s a sign of living - a refusal to die. Through anger, you say no to a brutal situation” (Dayyeh 158). Everyone has a chance to resist. Resistance builds strength and courage. Refusing to respond to IDF instructions in Hebrew is a form of resistance; for some, painting on the Wall may be a form of resistance, for others not painting on the Wall is just as powerful. While smaller acts of resistance may be individually subjective, there is a necessity for all resistance movements to abide by a few common directives, such as the principle of nonviolence.

When the option of violence is eliminated, resistance must take on other manifestations; two such manifestations are art and culture. Within the larger Palestinian resistance movement, art resistance plays an inspiring role and allows for international as well as local interaction. Art becomes a powerful tool, an international language with the ability to transcend boundaries, borders, and backgrounds. A nonviolent approach is not the same as passive one, just like “resistance is not the same as survival. Survival is barely making it, just going on with your dealings. Resistance is acting consciously, purposefully on your situation” (Dayyeh 158). Nonviolent resistance plays an active and conscious role in the conflict, seeking to reclaim notions of Palestinian identity, hope, and future, which had been previously warped. Anger is raw energy, it should add momentum and increase passion; anger is only detrimental when it is manifested through violence.

The Cultural Intifada, while revolving around an effort to redefine Palestinian identity, simultaneously seeks to resist the normalization of the occupation. Many art resistance movements also act as coping mechanisms in an effort to reduce the effectiveness of the occupation’s symbolic violence, and psychological feelings of imprisonment, particularly among younger generations. The Occupation steals the childhoods of Palestinian youth in an effort to break Palestinian spirits. Educators often take children to the Wall and encourage them to draw or paint on it “to ensure that the children keep the abnormality of the situation in mind without fearing it” (Piquard 118).

Diverse forms of art resistance movements are developing all over Palestine; resistance through theater, song, poetry, murals on the Wall, political graffiti in urban areas, youth photography, political youth magazines, children’s books – the possibilities are endless. These forms of creation under occupation highlight the inspiring resilience of Palestinians in the face of ongoing repression. Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish is arguably the grandfather of the current Cultural Intifada. Born in 1942, his childhood was robbed by al-Nakba, the uprooting of Muslims during the 1948 war, when his family became internal refugees. Darwish has been popularly considered to be the “voice of the Palestinian Diaspora.” His poem, “Identity Card,” was even turned into a protest song in 1964. Darwish believed that “[such] transitions
aren’t about a change in ideas, but rather about a change of instruments for action,” and that “only culture is a guarantee of true peace” (Yeshurun 61). Darwish thought that exile was largely psychological and internal, but that art grows out of the simple things, and so can be a form of refuge from the day-to-day suffering. All of Darwish’s poetry embodies themes of identity and exile, reflecting a collective Palestinian state of mind: “Previously, I believed that poetry was a form of combat, but today I don’t think that it has an immediate task. Its influence is very slow, cumulative… poetry is a reactionary form of writing. It always listens to voices from the past, to voices that are no longer” (Yeshurun 67). In his resistance, Darwish made sure to clarify that he was not against Jews or Israelis, but rather the occupation and the systematic oppression by the state – such distinctions are crucial because for Darwish, true peace can only come about through dialogue and a belief that everyone has the right to express himself.

The Separation Wall is the most obvious symbol of Israeli oppression within the West Bank – in some places it reaches up to twenty-five feet in height, stretching 400 miles deep in and around Palestinian territories. It is a terrifying sculpture of concrete and razor wire. Its erection is a result of Palestinian bombings during the Second Intifada, as justified by the IDF. While the first intifada was characterized by its political nature, the second stands in stark contrast through its violence, which ensued in the wake of the failure of the Oslo Accords in 1999. Palestinian frustrations were manifested in violent guerilla tactics against not just the IDF, but civilian Israeli populations as well. This period is characterized internally and internationally through the increase in suicide bombings as a strategy of various factions of Palestinian resistance movements. Suicide bombers had the ability to access every major Israeli city, and Palestinian society largely utilized this devaluation of human life as a means of defiance. The pace of attacks was troublesome to Israelis, “the barrier functioned as the ultimate checkpoint: difficult to bypass and always active” limiting Palestinian ability of resistance (Byman 832). In the short-term, Israel’s policies appear to keep its citizens safe from violent direct attacks, but many policies, like the addition of the Separation barrier, are highly intrusive and in the long-term inhibit a peace agreement.

The Separation Wall enjoys immense popularity among Israel’s general population, and there is little internal criticism of this poorly managed, ugly and internationally condemned obstruction. The Wall was built to limit Palestinian access to Israel proper and has succeeded in that manner. Yet on the other side, the bleakness of the pale grey cement looks long, cold, and winding – snake-like in many ways – “the Wall makes me feel as though I am in a bottle…[causing] feelings of suffocation” (Bitar 168). The symbolic oppression in the Wall lies not just in its ominous and looming physical presence, but also in the mental walls it erects between families, communities, lovers, friends and colleagues, destroying Palestinian social and spatial environments, and making communication difficult if not impossible. The Wall is intended to act as a containment force in the wake of violence during the second intifada: “practically speaking, the Wall is imprisoning us even though the gates are not on the house itself, but beyond. To go in and out you will need a special permit, and you will need to pay for it… You’re constantly on the alert and feel very vulnerable. To say this is a disempowering experience is an understatement. In fact, you are being choked unmercifully [and] cold-bloodedly” (Dayyeh 156).

Walls are some of the most violent manifestations of physical and psychological oppression directed against Palestinians on both a collective and individual level. The hindrance and restriction of physical movement can often result in psychological blockages intensified through the Wall’s symbolic reinforcement of a collective denial of Palestinian existence. The Wall emerged as a “solution” to the violence and destruction during the Second Intifada, a way to contain the “trouble-makers,” so Israeli life can continue peacefully. However, this containment strategy provides no real sense of Israeli security, but rather acts mainly as a dehumanizing force, separating Palestinians from each other. “Israelis may gain some sort of tranquility in the short run, but if not real settlement is found – a genuinely just solution – then those mosquitoes will just tear a hole in the screen and come to bother them again. Whatever barriers or walls are built, they will never preserve the tranquility or peace in the future” (Bitar 173). With the construction of the Wall, it seemed to many that, overnight, neighborhoods were transformed from residential areas into militarized zones, families could no longer visit each other freely, often resulting in separation, and losses in income as a result of unemployment due to restrictions on mobility and access in and out of the Territories.

The Wall depresses everyone. Within the context of the conflict, the Palestinian people have limited rights, if any at all. According to Brigitte Piquard, an Associate Professor of Humanitarian Action & Conflict at Oxford Brookes University,
The confiscation of land, the destruction of visual perspective, the closure of enclaves, the denial of privacy, the destruction of landscape, the systematic control of Palestinian places of memories and social meanings can be described as acts of ‘spatiocide’ and ‘urbicide’ (massive destruction and disorganization of space and cities) and even, in combination with symbolic violence, as a form of ethnocide (the deliberate eradication of the culture of a specific group) (Piquard 111).

The Wall is a sizeable and apparent tactic of ‘spatiocide’ used during the Occupation, attempting to conceal Palestinian existence from not just Israeli society, but the international (tourist) community as well. However since its construction, the Wall has displayed political slogans, graffiti, and murals by artists and activists alike on the West Bank side – visual art has historically been considered one of the most symbolic and prevailing expressions of resilience, with obvious parallels to the Berlin Wall. The art on the Wall is continuously being created, destroyed, and painted over, and yet “the act of painting and the process of creation are by themselves significant, whatever the content or location. The emphasis is on the active dimension of this expression of resilience, which is viewed as an ongoing process” (Piquard 112).

Expressions on the Wall are fluid, some pieces last for a mere couple of days, while others exist long enough to become part of collective memory.

Putting slogans and symbols on the Wall can be a way to reclaim the occupied space; the copious number of “representations on the Wall are [all] expressions of current feelings that underlie a specific understanding of the situation and response to it…the relationship between space and territory and between identity and otherness” (Piquard 114). Therefore the artistic symbolism is directly linked to the larger process of identity formulation. The process of creating a visual art piece on the Wall can offer a very personal perspective on the conflict; however, once a piece is completed the representation becomes part of a larger collective identity, often becoming an emblem of Palestinian resistance, in the process acquiring ideological and symbolic meanings that the artist did not perhaps intend. Closure is a common theme expressed through symbols longing for openness (windows, holes in the Wall and painted ladders); nationalism is also a prominent theme, with the colors of the Palestinian flag, as well as the flag sprinkled consistently throughout. For some, this act act as a reminder of the vibrancy of the Palestinian cause, continuously demanding resistance to the Occupation. And every picture of the Wall that is seen and understood by an outsider works to diminish the integrity of its builders, and shift international discourse about Palestinian identities, breaking the notion of a “culture of violence” and the morality of the conflict.

Expressions of visual art along the Wall are not the only type of artistic resistance present in Palestine. The Freedom Theater, which is located in the refugee camp just outside of Jenin, stands out as creative oasis in a community of chaos. The Freedom Theater’s mission statement highlights empowerment through expressions of art: “While emphasizing professionalism and innovation, the aim of the theater is also to empower youth and women in the community and to explore the potential of the arts as an important catalyst for social change” (Al-Raee and Stanczak). The theater seeks to empower the younger generation to promote positive change through the arts, beginning with closing the cultural gap separating Jenin from larger Palestinian society, as well as the global community. The theater program offers acting classes, opportunities for performance, hosting performances, playback theater, psychodrama and drama workshops, along with performance tours. The theater includes multimedia programs such as filmmaking, photography, and creative writing. The Freedom Theater is an artistic sanctuary; its existence in itself shatters Palestinian cultural taboos, while simultaneously challenging structural injustices imposed by the occupying state through the creation of false norms. The theater was founded in part by Juliano Mer Khamis, a prominent Israeli actor, born to a Jewish mother and Palestinian father – he straddled two cultures and chose to exist in both, effectively breaking the ‘us vs. them’ binary. His co-founder was also an unlikely character, Zakaria Zubeidi, former head of the Al-Aqsa Brigades, now a reformed nonviolent activist. This duo recognized the importance of creative outlets for expressions of frustration, anger and despair that are also culturally productive. The Freedom Theater was created out of necessity after Arna’s Stone Theater, which was founded by Juliano’s mother, was destroyed during the Israeli invasion of the camp in 2002 – most of the students died as a result of the violence from the Second Intifada. Arna’s Stone Theater was an art project established in the 1980s, which sought to address the impact of the occupation on youth. The Freedom Theater today continues Arna’s work through a three-program approach. The first is Playback Theater, which is used as a tool for community building, conflict
that we can. Like us and our lives and circumstances are not normal, but we have to cope with them in the best way constantly resisting the normalization of such a childhood. One Palestinian admitted that, “people don't live confrontation with IDF soldiers. Children are taught how to adapt themselves to the Occupation, while physical trauma for all Palestinians, but is particularly noticeable among children who are in almost daily cause, and a dream that one day the Israeli state will be held to account for its human rights abuses. However, the Theater is not without its challenges, including constant funding concerns given its reliance on international funding. The Theater also continuously faces harassment by the Israeli army, which has detained and interrogated numerous staff members, students and volunteers at various times. Most recently, it was apparent that the theater was still reeling from the murder of co-founder Juliano in April of 2011 – according to many students and visitors of the Freedom Theater, Juliano was the soul of the movement and his loss was greatly felt. Yet none of this keeps the Theater's doors closed and while one can still feel sorrow hanging in the air, everyone kept beautifully reaffirming, with inspiring resilience, that the show must go on. Some things are larger than life.

If the Freedom Theater emphasizes anything, it is the importance of the youth voice in the emerging Cultural Intifada. Resistance is passed down through younger generations, who will soon be responsible for the movement’s future. The Occupation has caused various forms of political, social, emotional, and physical trauma for all Palestinians, but is particularly noticeable among children who are in almost daily confrontation with IDF soldiers. Children are taught how to adapt themselves to the Occupation, while constantly resisting the normalization of such a childhood. One Palestinian admitted that, “people don’t live like us and our lives and circumstances are not normal, but we have to cope with them in the best way that we can. We can feel depressed and frustrated, but we can’t give into those feelings for a long time. It's normal to feel afraid and angry, but those feelings have to be channeled towards a positive direction” (Atallah 103). Many Palestinians share a belief that their only hope is for their children, which is not an easy realization to admit. Mahatma Gandhi once said, “If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.” Hope lies in the vibrancy of youth, who embody all the hopes and dreams of a marginalized community. Compared to them, older generations seem zombie-like, existing in a trance, numbed by years of testing. Within art resistance movements, “children are not only [considered to be] the future, but also the ‘change makers’ of the present” and therefore must learn from previous generations mistakes (Abusrour 93-94). The teaching of discipline and patience is essential. The young are ambitious and bring hope, yet with such high dreams and such large expectations, the disappointing effect of harsh realities is often unduly cruel.

The idealism of the youth is inspiring, but also dangerous. Hope should be linked to something concrete, then divided up into smaller, more attainable objectives. The Lajee Community Center, located at the front of the Aida refugee camp near the Rachel’s Tomb Checkpoint, was established in 1999 by camp volunteers in an effort to ensure that future generations would have greater opportunities based on critical-thinking and decision-making. Around 4,500 Palestinians live in the U.N. Aida Refugee Camp, and more than half of them are children. The Lajee Center allows children to put on plays, learn Dabkeh (traditional Palestinian folk dancing), draw pictures, read books from the Center’s Library, and earn computer time in the Center’s lab. It is an effort to help Palestinian youth realize their full potential despite the oppression from the Occupation. The Center publishes political youth magazines, children’s books, and photography exhibits comprised entirely of youth efforts. During my first visit this summer, what caught my eye was the negotiation, education and trauma recovery. The second is Drama for Conflict Transformation, which is a technique in which political and social scenarios are tested for use in real world situations, and the third is a Trauma Response Project, which uses psychodrama methods to address issues of occupational trauma (Khalidi, Mee and Wallace).

The Freedom Theater is an incredibly inspiring place and its vibrancy can be felt the moment you step through the front gate: there are children laughing everywhere and older youth running around filming, or in and out of editing rooms. It is impossible not to feel the Theater's pulse. According to Juliano, the magic of the Theater lies within the youth themselves: “By practicing the art of theatre, these hungry, isolated, aspiring human beings were collectively empowering themselves to find a future for themselves individually and for their emerging nation” (Khalidi, Mee and Wallace). The Theater acts as a venue where creative arts are given the space to counter repressive aspects within Palestinian society, and challenge the deprivations of occupation. The structural injustice of the Occupation is part of a systematic effort to foster a sense of intense isolation, particularly within younger generations. In my interview with Jonathan Stanczak, current managing director of the theater, he noted that, “We hope that this theatre will generate a political artistic movement of artists whose mere existence is a threat to reactionaries and extremists, whether in the Israeli government, the illegal settlements, the hierarchal structure within refugee camps, or the U.S. Congress and academia” (Stanczak). The Freedom Theater continuously looks to the future for hope. It looks to graduates as revolutionary artists, increased international interest in the Palestinian cause, and a dream that one day the Israeli state will be held to account for its human rights abuses.
publication of a children's book for sale, particularly one entitled *The Boy and the Wall*. The story was authored and illustrated entirely by young children at the Center as part of an art therapy project to familiarize smaller children with the abnormality of the Wall while eliminating their fears. The story is divided into three stages: Life before the Wall, when the children were able to play soccer and catch turtles in the meadow behind the camp; Life during the Wall's construction, a period marked by intense apprehension and fear of future effects; and Conversations with the boy's mother about how to overcome the Wall. What is so striking about the book is the depth it has, considering it was authored and illustrated by children. The boy's various strategies for overcoming the Wall are simplistic materializations of complex political and social issues. At first the boy wants to be an onion patch growing around the base of the Wall to soothe the tear gas burns of the community. Then he wishes to be a mosque, a continuous reminder of the faith Palestinians must have. Next, a kite very high in the air with dreams of social, spatial and physical freedoms, then a group of young men dancing at a wedding who cause the ground to shake by sheer power in the unified force of their footsteps, then a fig tree rooted so firmly in the soil that the roots crack the cement, and finally the boy ends with a desire to become a book full of adventures to illustrate the abnormality of the situation and expose youth to other ways of life. The book begins: “He used to dream in the direction of Jerusalem,” signifying a recognition that the Wall is wrong, and while its existence is confusing, the negative effects of its restrictive presence are clearly understood.

Resistance may not always be tangible and immediate, but when people fight for life, there is hope. According to Rich Wiles, author of the book *Generation Palestine*, “To achieve long-term sustainability, long-term projects must be implemented by local people” (Ajarma, Azzeh and al-Azza 6). The notion of “kids with cameras” is not new to cultural resistance movements. It is a relatively popular creative model of resistance which been previously employed against the South African Apartheid regime, in Northern Ireland, and in the Balkans conflict, among other places. The power of visual art, like murals on the Wall, stems from its ability to act as a universal language without saying a word. Youth photography projects allow the world to view the conflict from a different angle. The Lajee Community Center in the Aida Camp continuously displays themed photography in the Center itself, but also publishes youth photography magazines, which are available for sale to the public. The Center’s current photography exhibit was themed “Dreams and Nightmares, Hopes and Fears.” The exhibit was powerful and not easy to look at; the young artists have experienced so much in their short lives, and that was reflected honestly in their photos. Some dreamed of education, freedom and the future, while others' nightmares involve the loss of a loved one at the hands of the Occupation. Just outside the exhibit I purchased a photography book entitled *The Power of Culture: Photography by the New Generation of Palestinian Refugees*; most impressive was that all the artists featured in the book are between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. In Kholoud Ajarma’s 2010 project, “Out of Focus,” she displays the misrepresentation of Palestinian identity within a global context, noting “events in Palestine sometimes make the news, but they are rarely explained accurately and understood well. When international attention is drawn to Palestine, it never lasts long…..” (54) Her photos emphasize how out of touch the international community is with Palestinian realities. For artist Mohammed al-Azza, photography exists as a medium through which Palestinians can communicate resistance. “We are not a powerful state in world terms, but through images we can tell many stories to the world. For me, this is my resistance.” (40) In his first featured project “Reflections of Palestine,” Azza plays with indirect images of his reality – people’s shadows on the Wall, or reflections, in dirty puddles, of a large symbolic Key that sits atop the entrance to the Aida Camp. Azza’s second featured project, “Images Behind the Screen,” is a much more political attempt to humanize Palestinian identity. Of it, Azza says “If people believe only what the mass media shows of our lives, they will see only soldiers, death, and martyrs” (96). Azza’s second project highlights the vibrancy of movement within Palestinian communities: children playing, men picking olives, women cooking, grandparents praying, and flags flapping in the wind. The projects in this book focus on the ways in which Palestinian culture and identity are formulated – resistance to the Occupation is deepest when built upon the foundational memories of grandparents, ensuring survival even in exile or as refugees hidden behind a Wall. Palestinian youth photography speaks volumes, without ever uttering one word; once produced these images take on an identity of their own, with the ability to be reproduced and reinterpreted, without losing symbolic power.

Palestinian youth resupply older generations with hope. Hope that one day, things really will begin to change for the better. Hope than when such a day comes it will be easily recognizable. Hope for a time untainted by broken promises. Hope for open spaces and unrestricted mobility, for a shift in international opinions on Palestinian identity, and for for a day when the dark shadows of a violent past begin to fade.
Palestinian singer, Mohammad Assaf, winner of Arab Idol 2013, is a manifestation of some of these hopes for Palestine. Assaf was born in Libya to Palestinian parents, who moved him and his seven other siblings back to Gaza when he was four. Gaza is perpetually under siege, with movement prohibited. This proved to be an obstacle for Assaf during his journey to the Arab Idol auditions in Egypt, when he resorted to singing to the soldiers in an effort to allow him across the border. Once at the auditions, he couldn’t get in without a number, so he sang again and a fellow Palestinian gave up his spot to Assaf, who was the last contestant to audition. I was fortunate enough to spend time in Palestine during the show’s season – on Friday, streets in cities all across the countryside, from Haifa to Hebron, would shut down, Palestinians flooding into the streets to crowding around large projection screens, the feeling of a collective hope pulsing through the air. Assaf’s final Idol performance was the Palestinian nationalist anthem (“Ali al-Keffiyeh”), which called on Palestinians to unite in spite of political, social, geographic, and psychological divisions. The energy felt during Assaf’s final performance was electric: everywhere I turned Palestinians of all ages had proud and hopeful looks on their faces, imagining a day when the fear of bombs falling from the sky was eliminated, home demolitions and checkpoints were a thing of the past, refugee camps and settlements evaporated, cities were no longer segregated, permits vanished, and the notion of “lost generations” was in fact only a distant and quickly fading nightmare. His Idol victory was the icing on the cake, awakening feelings of nationalist pride and hope around the globe. Assaf’s success during and since late June is increasingly threatening to Israel. Since Assaf’s win, he has become the first regional youth ambassador to the UNRWA and has been provided a diplomatic passport by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, and designated as the “Ambassador of Culture and Arts in Palestine.” Assaf has recently received a U.N. passport, allowing him global mobility. In a late August interview, Assaf said “music is essential…music is something that changes the world. Music is a noble message that reaches people’s hearts faster than anything else…I want to influence people through my artistic message...to produce [art] from the middle of this suffering, from the middle of war, to have a flower growing in the middle of a desert, this is something present in all Palestinian youth” (Assaf). The Palestinian people are educated, animated and resilient; they exist in a diverse range of communities from Nazareth to Ramallah to the refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon. The vibrancy of Palestinian culture and identities is a constant opposition force resisting the Occupation’s attempts to market the prevailing idea of Palestinian terrorism.

Art is powerful, but art alone cannot deliver justice. However, artistic tools can never be fully restrained, and its role as a resistance tactic can compliment the expansion of a more generalized nationalist movement. The Western world, particularly the United States, typically associates the word ‘Palestine’ with ‘conflict’, ‘terrorism’, ‘refugees’ and ‘Israel’ and the specificities of the conflict are discussed minimally, often with a pro-Israeli bias. The Occupation is a result of, “a convergence of factors that are all designed to continuously degrade the human being, to deprive you of your dignity. Palestinians are subjected to daily experiences that drive us crazy, but still we manage to overcome whatever experiences we go through and are somehow able to challenge the things that cannot be challenged” (Bitar 176). Visual art on the Wall, performances at The Freedom Theater, feelings of exposure and empowerment from the publication of refugee youth photography and children’s books, and international recognition for a singer from Gaza, help to present the international community with new images of Palestine. There needs to be a process of ‘correcting’ the Western world’s assumptions about Palestinian identity, through internet exposure, exhibitions, performances, books, etc. In his speech “Where Do We Go From Here” given in 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, “As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free...” [each must] say to himself and to the world, “I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor. I have a rich and noble history, however painful and exploited that history has been.” Palestinians have been struggling for generations, for the right to self-determination, the right to claim a sovereign identity free from connotations of conflict and associations with violence. A Cultural Intifada may not be enough to put an end to the Israeli Occupation, but maybe that is too lofty of an aspiration – perhaps the potency of such a movement lies in its ability to remind Palestinians that there is more that unites them than divides them.

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