This paper will draw upon theories of visibility and recent fieldwork conducted by Huw. The point of this paper is to work through some thoughts and ideas concerning Palestinian identity, but particularly addressing the process around the production of visibility, rather than the representation outright. With that in mind, the paper will conclude with a short audio-visual excerpt of the final film.

As we sat to write this paper, I took a moment off to read the No Captions Needed blog. I came across a post that resonated with the status quo of the Palestinian cause – that “too many people [in the West] don’t care, and thus don’t look. The author, Robert Hariman, writing in relation to this image (insert image) suggests that very often the suffering of individuals or groups of people needs to be framed with recognisable markers that help voice distress or discomfort. These markers are varied and contingent to the context of the event being photographed.

Hariman’s examination of the ‘Afghanstans Children of War’ series, published on the 1st Aug, 2013 in The Atlantic focuses in on 1 of 44 images of children in a number of scenes and scenarios.

As you can see, the image presents a young girl of 8-years, kicking a red ball down a corridor while recovering at the U.S. military hospital in north of Kabul, on June 11, 2009.

The caption tells the spectator that, Razia [the girl] was evacuated to the hospital in May ‘after (And I quote) she was severely burned when a white phosphorus round hit her home... (quote – The Atlantic, 1/08/2013).

Hariman situates his reading of the image in relation to iconic images of the past, and specifically, of Kim Phuc, running down a Vietnamese road, having been burnt by napalm (An image we’re all familiar with).

It is at this moment that I could follow Hariman’s trajectory – that icons of war and how people now look, or are presented with images of conflict, pain and distress, are often dismissed.

In both photos, each girl has suffered unimaginable pain and share similar narratives, yet what becomes apparent in the image of Razia, and other recent cases internationally, is that the emotional response to images of distress, pain or victimisation are often lacking when the
marker of distress and discomfort is represented in a setting that complicates the reading of the image for the spectator, or requires a different kind of looking.

Simply put, the icons of war that ground images of distress, which the young afghan girl encountered, have been removed from the frame. Like Harminan, Jacques Rancière, identifies a general suspicion about the political capacity of, what he calls, intolerable images.

Icons of war and the markers of pain exist; Rancière writes, within a system that creates a certain sense of reality, a certain common sense. The common sense in this respect is a visibility that is sharable and understandable by all, with sharable meanings conferred on them.

However, other forms of documentation help sketch new configurations of what can be seen and thought, offering what Rancière suggests to be, a new landscape of the possible on the condition that their meaning or effect is not anticipated. This refusal or denial of the iconic or intolerable can be seen in the photo by Sophie Ristelhueber who effects a displacement of the exhausted icon of the occupation with something more curious, but similar.

This photo, like the photo that Harminan explores and those that will follow are the ‘wounds and scares’ of conflict, not the emblems or icons; they require a different form of looking and are produced through a different visibility.

Within the OT a number of visibilities are produced. Jawad has suggested that Palestinian visibility is often tantamount to a form of theatre (Jawad, 2011) whereby ritualistic behaviour is enacted, recorded and disseminated across a number of platforms.

While art and documentary photography has sought to distance itself from the clichéd tropes of pain and suffering, one must always remember that visibility is not simply about aesthetic, but also a means of power.

Power and visibility, in the context of an occupation are waged over by different entities with different agendas. While the Israeli state can be accused of legitimising its policies, framing the Palestinian as a terror threat to state security, the most common alternative, Allen argues is the production of Palestinian suffering, by NGOs but also, directly, by the Palestinian confronted by the media. This dependence on ‘affect laden concepts of humanity’ (Allen, 2009: 163) is also identified by
Aurelia Azoulay who notes that because the Israeli state has imposed a sense of emergency upon the Palestinian people, the visibility produced as a result, through NGOs, photojournalism and documentary photography ensures that they are, at the very least, visible. This visibility is also a form of protectionism, because, as Faulkner notes, power also involves keeping others invisible (Faulkner, 2013).

Yet it can be suggested from this, that the Palestinian has blighted by a cycle of misrepresentations and clichéd imagery.

The scopic regime afforded to the Palestinian limits their visibility. Whereas their precarious conditions ensures they remain, in part, visible, through attempts to make them invisible, as such the Palestinian is provisional.

Often, replaced metonymically by the new icons of the occupation: objects of separation, walls, and barriers, checkpoints and roadblocks, however, as noted above, it is how one is enabled to look that one can truly see the Palestinian, while particular practices ensures interest is not diluted.
- I'm going to show a few photographs as I speak, and at the end I'll play a few minutes from my MA piece.

Before I began my project, I read a brilliant book by Edward Said and Jean Mohr called 'After the last sky'. As Said explores his own identity through the touching images of the Swiss photographer, we get an insight into what it’s like to be Palestinian and how the crisis shapes the life of an exile like Said. Mohr’s images show, as they did in collaborations with John Berger, that photography and text are capable of both an emotional and academic insight.

With this book in mind, last summer I went to Israel and the Occupied Territories for six weeks to carry out the fieldwork for my MA. As Gary has highlighted, the issue of representation for Palestinians is tantamount to their struggle. I wanted to see if questions asked by academics regarding representation were being explored through visual means, so I set out to find local photographers engaged in similar debates through their work. I was interested in how they represented a conflict they lived within; how useful they thought photography could be in changing the situation; and practically how they made their work.

My focus on local artists grew from an uncomfortable relationship towards the history of photography as a colonial tool, a feeling Elizabeth Dauphinee talks about in her book ‘The ethics of researching war’, and Said details in ‘Covering Islam’. I could never know what it was like to live as a Palestinian under occupation, or an Israeli against the actions of their government, but I could talk to and photograph the people there who did. I also wanted to explore more general questions about representing suffering through photography.

But once I was there, the more I spoke to people the less I felt I could really conclude, and basic questions about the image began to dominate my thoughts. I really had no answers, and at moments of taking photographs, I often felt deflated, like I was one of a multitude trying to show misery I had no real connection to. During my stay I met press and activist photographers, artists and writers. Most were from Palestine or Israel, and deeply engaged in the struggle for Palestinian freedom, and there are too many individual stories to tell and fit in here, but it was in the conversations I recorded that I connected most intimately with the situation and these people.
I used black and white film, and only developed the images once I was back home. The time between my taking them and the development made the trip feel distant, and the images took on a very ambiguous quality.

It is true that the image usually necessitates captioning, as Gary has said, to contextualise and guide the viewer. It needs strong symbols. I was against doing this to my images because the ambiguity became part of what I felt in taking them. I felt awkward, guilty, and confused as to my ‘role’, and the ‘role’ of my camera. Was I a voyeur of suffering, or did they truly express my experience there? The conversations spanned hours of audio and confused my thoughts, and the photographs seemed to objectify the things I had seen, to make them impersonal.

But, I do not believe in such a thing as objectivity in the mass media sense of the word, I believe in stories. The filmmaker Adam Curtis always starts a film with the words, “I'm going to tell you a story about...”, and with the same pre-text, I wanted to tell the story of the issue of representation for the people I had met. I began to mix the conversations with the photographs, leaving them uncaptioned, in order to explore the disconnection between the voices and the images aiming to open up the space for these people's ideas and my images to interact, to remain unnamed and uncaptioned.

I think what we really end up with here are two interlinked issues; the conflict between people and the conflict between art and documentation, between art and reality. My ontological experience during my fieldwork, that is to say the experience of being alive and responsive, became translated into mechanical actions of the camera and what I chose as a subject. The intentionality is not scientific, I took these photos to express my purpose, my feelings, and what returns when I look at them is that vague feeling I had to begin with, the desire to explore a complex inter-subjective topic without prerequisites, or requirements to come back with a certain image. You have the idea, you make it, and then you reflect on the reconstruction. Any image is, for me at least, a reconstruction of that immediate inspiration, the feeling I had at the beginning, something I try to regain during the process of making. And the result is only more questions, often obvious ones repeated again and again; Can photography represent a reality? What use it is to take a picture of suffering? Is the camera separate from the photographer? And so on...
As complicated as we make it, life, and photography, always go back to the most basic of questions. So I want to end with something the war photographer Don McCullun said in a recent documentary (McCullin 2012), “Photographs tell the truth if they are handled by a truthful person.” I like the sentiment of this, but I think he’s wrong to think of the photo as representative of anything ‘true’ reality. I prefer the vaguer attempt by the Israeli photographer Miki Kratsman, who says, “The photograph is a metaphor for something, it is not the real thing....”.

So now, we’re going to show the last five minutes of my MA piece now, and you can hear Miki expand on this at the end.