

<p><b>Institution:</b> 10007857 – Bangor University</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Exploring Jews, Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Global Media, 1990-present</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Bangor’s research on stereotyping of Jews, Jewishness and Judaism in contemporary global media significantly facilitates understanding on the part of the public, media, religious educators and cultural industries of challenges facing Jewish cultures and communities, thus impacting on civil society, cultural life and public discourse. Bangor’s work enhances regional, national and international public awareness of contemporary media’s representations of Jewishness and stereotyping. Its presentation of Jewish cultural heritage helps to preserve and conserve it while increasing understanding of social and cultural identity and encouraging social inclusion.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This research has been conducted by Prof Nathan Abrams (at Bangor since 2006) since 2008 and focuses on representations of Jews, Jewishness and Judaism in contemporary global media from 1990 to the present. The research innovatively considered Jews, Jewishness and Judaism as overlapping but often discrete categories within a tradition that largely elides the ethnic/religious distinction evident in contemporary Jewish life. It has covered themes not previously considered, such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Judaism as religion in film, kashrut and food in film and the bathroom as Jewish heterotopic cinematic space (3.1), 2008 – present;</li> <li>2. The role of Jews in front of and behind the camera in British film and television 2011 - present (3.2, 3.3);</li> <li>3. Applying the oldest form of Jewish exegesis – midrash – to film, in particular the work of Stanley Kubrick in order to place film studies outside a Western-centric, European-focused framework, 2012 – present (3.4);</li> <li>4. Pioneering exploration of Judaism in video games and social networking sites, 2009 - present (3.6).</li> </ol> <p>Facilitated by an AHRC Fellowship (£76,199), BA small grant (£10,000) and Rothschild Foundation Europe grant (£3,000), since January 2012 Abrams’ research is focused on Stanley Kubrick as a New York Jewish Intellectual and Auteur. It is the first project to use archival materials systematically, including Kubrick’s archives, to consider how Kubrick’s ethnic heritage and New York Intellectual pedigree influenced his directorial vision and has already generated impact. Some of the results of this research have already been published (3.2, 3.3) and will be expanded in an edited collection (<i>The Hidden Presence of Jews in British Film and Television</i>) in 2014 to be published by Northwestern UP.</p> <p><b>Research Findings</b></p> <p>The most significant findings were in three areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Representations of Jews, Jewishness and Judaism (cinema/video gaming/social networking).</b> An assessment of changes in the number and nature of representations of Jews, Jewishness and Judaism in cinema globally since 1990 discovered a quantitative and qualitative shift that represents a significant departure from the binary representations of the past. A spectrum between formerly extreme poles of stereotyping is now being populated. Exploration of stereotypical representations in video gaming have been pioneered and research into social networking, in particular Facebook, have opened up new areas to consider how online activities have an impact in the offline world by influencing congregational formation among young Jews (3.1, 3.2, 3.6).</li> <li><b>2. Stereotyping and self-images of Jews, Jewishness and Judaism.</b> Identification of significant trends in stereotyping and self-images of the above, both from the out-group and in-group perspective, including fostering intergroup and interfaith relations. There is a move away from more didactic edifying images to those that show less concern with what out-group members think (3.1).</li> <li><b>3. Implicit, conceptual, and sub-textual Jewishness.</b> The extension of research into new areas has considered Jewishness where it is rendered implicit, conceptual, and sub-textual rather than</li> </ol>

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overt and explicit. In many films the 'ethnicity' of the text is beneath the surface, e.g. *The Shining* (1980) or the *007* franchise (3.1, 3.5). The significance of the research lies in the widening of how stereotyping can operate beneath the surface of media texts thereby generating subtle but potentially insidious impacts on popular understanding of ethnicities.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1. Abrams, N. *The New Jew in Film: Exploring Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 272 pp. Submitted to REF2014 (REF Identifier 3501), this is the first monograph to cover global Jewish output since 1990 (90,000 words).
- 3.2. Abrams, N. *Journal of European Popular Culture* 10.1 (2012). This special issue was the first of its kind to consider the role of Jews both in front of and behind the camera in British cinema. Published is an international peer-reviewed journal for European culture.  
URL: <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue,id=2357/>
- 3.3. Abrams, N. 'Hidden: Jewish Film in the United Kingdom, Past and Present', *Journal of European Popular Culture* 1.1 (2010): 53-68. Submitted to REF2014 (REF Identifier 3503), this article was the first academic overview of UK Jewish film-making.
- 3.4. Abrams, N. "A double set of glasses": Stanley Kubrick and the Midrashic Mode of Interpretation', in *De-Westernizing Film Studies*, ed. Saer Maty Ba and Will Higbee (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 141-51. First essay to consider the sub-textual Jewishness of Kubrick's work. This output can be made available upon request.
- 3.5. Abrams, N. *Jewish Film and New Media: An International Journal*. Wayne State UP, 2012–. Biannual. A dedicated forum for peer-reviewed academic publishing on these topics. URL: <http://wsupress.wayne.edu/journals/detail/jewish-film-new-media>
- 3.6. 'Grassroots Religion: Facebook and Offline Post-Denominational Judaism'. Co-authored with S. Baker (Bangor) and B. J. Brown (DMU). In *Social Media Religion and Spirituality*, ed. M. Gillespie, D. Herbert, A. Greenhill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013): 143-163. First essay to consider how young Jews use social networking in the offline world. This output can be made available upon request.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The underpinning research made a distinct and material contribution to impact in the following ways:

1. Generating new ways of thinking that influence creative practice;
2. Informing and influencing the understanding of religious/ethnic discrimination;
3. Preserving, conserving, and presenting cultural heritage;
4. Helping media, Jewish education and other professionals adapt to changing cultural values.

Specifically, this research has:

**Enhanced regional, national and international public awareness of representations of ethnic minorities in contemporary media** resulting in cultural and intellectual enrichment of the wider public. The Assignments Editor for *Ha'aretz's* English Edition stated: 'Abrams offers our publication a singularly interdisciplinary perspective (...) Due to their quality and originality, his articles have featured prominently on our website and attracted great interest from our readers, sometimes garnering up to thousands of unique visitors. Thanks to his ability to adapt it to our target readership, by highlighting Jewish- and Israel-related issues in his myriad fields of expertise, his contribution is greatly valued and cherished' (5.6; see also 5.7).

**Contributed to social and cultural identity of the global Jewish diaspora by reconfiguring media as a site of ethnic identification and pride rather than simply negative stereotyping.** According to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC) (5.3), 'by placing in the center of his interest the way Jews and Judaism are portrayed by contemporary films produced in the Western world, Dr. Abrams opened a very interesting avenue whereby young adults were able to question their own identity, culture, tradition, affiliation and prejudices.'

**Encouraged social inclusion through greater public and media understanding of how ethnic stereotyping works in media, particularly in a non-US context.** AJJDC: 'Abrams' lectures resulted in a deeper understanding of films as cultural products for many young adults, and therefore capable of being analyzed as devices carrying social messages, ideologies' (5.3; see also 5.7)

**Changed popular film critics' interpretations and preconceptions.** Head Of Content, @TopFilmTip testifies that: 'Abrams' work has provided fascinating scope into the counter conventional depiction of Jewish protagonists in cinema. In particular, his book (3.1) has provided much influence for our content. His discussion of the Walter character in the Coen Brothers film *The Big Lebowski* has directly influenced our interpretation of this film to the point that we sold an article incorporating some of his insights ('Could *The Big Lebowski* Be The Greatest Film Ever Made?') to Siemens via SabotageTimes.com' (5.4). See also 5.6-5.11.

**Pointed the public and media to how stereotyping can work on a more sub-textual level,** in particular where it concerns non-visible minorities such as Jews, widening understanding of how texts can display ethnic characteristics even when non-explicit. Referring to output 3.1, the Bookeywookee blog wrote: 'I tend not to be much of a fan of academic criticism of film or literature. I find most of it reductive and the language insular and convoluted, but what is interesting in this book is Abrams's argument that post-1990 one sees Jews in film as nationals, cowboys, skinheads, gay and many other categories and that the body of work by and about Jews in this period conveys the message that "there is more than one way to be Jewish." This is about as anti-reductive a message as one could hope for and is the strength of this book for my money' (5.10). (See also 5.7-5.9). As recognition of this, in September 2013, Abrams was invited to join ITV Wales' diversity panel.

### **Beneficiaries**

The main beneficiaries are media audiences (especially in Europe, North America and Israel) with an interest in Jewish issues. The research has also been used by UK synagogues to promote adult education and interfaith relationships; by the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati to educate a dozen US rabbinical students; to promote the study of the bible and the Jewish exegetical tradition of midrash through film, as well as how film can be considered as midrash, among adult education audiences at Limmud and the London School of Jewish Studies; for the education, in an informal setting, of young adults in former communist countries in terms of media stereotyping at Limmud for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

### **Scope**

Impacts of the research were generated through numerous essays, appearances in regional, national and international media, and extensive public speaking to the general global Jewish diaspora since 2008. Its **reach** is evidenced by the following:

**The number of personal requests for information and consultation by the mainstream media.** Across 2008-13, Abrams has made over 40 invited media appearances on the subject of representations of Jews, Judaism and Jewishness in international, national and regional outlets such as *BBC Radio Wales*, *BBC.co.uk*; *The Daily Post*, *The North Wales Chronicle*, *Western Mail*, *The Camden New Journal*, and *Muswell Hill Journal*. Abrams appeared in the BBC documentary *Coming Home* in December 2012.

**Appearances in diverse and global Jewish media** with a combined readership of thousands generating wider discussion in the media/public sphere. Publications include *The Jewish Week*, *Jewish Press*, *JBooks.com* and *Heeb Magazine*. From 2011, Abrams had regular columns in *The Jewish Telegraph* (circulation: approx. 50,000) – the only dedicated newspaper for regional Jewish communities in Northern England, Scotland and Wales; the *Jewish Daily Forward* (a historic New York-based newspaper), and *Ha'aretz Digital* (the leading Israeli platform whose print version has approx. 75,000 daily readers). Abrams recorded a podcast for the website *cartoonkippah.com*, one of the largest online young media outlets focusing on Jewish culture in the UK which has 1,647 subscribers and a further 79 downloaded the individual episode. His talk at Limmud Conference 2012 to an audience of over a hundred was also podcasted live.

**The number of times Abrams is requested to speak to international and diverse audiences.** Abrams is often requested to give popular talks based on his research at schools, synagogues, adult education conferences and societies, local history societies and film festivals, in the UK, Europe, North America and Israel. Abrams has delivered over 100 talks at synagogues, Jewish adult education conferences (the annual Limmud Conference attracts over 2,500 people world-wide), events in Bulgaria, Serbia, Italy, Sweden, Belgium, and the Jewish Museum in London to audiences ranging from 10-300. His public lectures and popular talks to audiences have totalled approx. 5000 members of the public.

**Consultation with leading figures** in the Jewish youth, adult and informal education, museum, film festival, cultural and rabbinical worlds (e.g. providing programming advice).

**Daily tweets on these issues**, generating sustained on-going public engagement with a highly-interested, self-selecting group. Abrams currently has over 600 unique followers on Twitter and tweets regularly to the film site @TopFilmTip, which has around 3,000 followers checking its daily feed, often getting upwards of 150-200 re-tweets a week.

**The translation and publication of the research abroad.** The research leading up to 3.1 has been translated and published in non-academic magazines such as *Ha'aretz*, *Szombat* (Hungary), *Judiska Kroniska* (Sweden), and *a Hebraica* (Brazil).

**The setting up of a dedicated International Film Festival.** A Welsh-Jewish mini film festival, organised by the First Minister for Wales's representative in New York, entitled 'Jewish Tales from Wales' was held in New York City in March 2012. Directly arising out of the research (3.2, 3.3), issues covered Welsh-Jewish identity and how this was expressed through a cinematic medium. The Welsh Assembly Government, Bangor University and the Museum of Jewish Heritage (MJH), New York jointly sponsored the festival. Abrams was involved in all post-screening discussions. The event received media coverage (5.9) and 270 people attended over two days, including the First Minister for Wales and high-profile entertainment industry figures. The Director of Public Programs at the MJH, stated 'the series cast light on the relatively unfamiliar Welsh experience and the still-more unfamiliar Welsh-Jewish connection' (5.1, 5.5).

**Overall, the significance** of the research stems from how it facilitates public understanding of how films challenge ethnic stereotyping, as evidenced by testimonials from opinion-leaders (5.1-5.5). Further recognising the significance of his impact, Abrams was appointed as a Public Engagement Ambassador by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement in 2011 and was also selected to be part of the Welsh Crucible 2013 programme of personal, professional and leadership development for highly promising research leaders of the future who are building their careers in Wales.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1. Director of Public Programs, Museum of Jewish Heritage
- 5.2. Chief Executive of the Jewish Community Centre for London and Former Executive Director of Limmud,
- 5.3. Operations Director, AJJDC International Centre for Community Development and Director, Regional community development-Europe, OJN, Croatia & Slovenia, AJJDC Europe. The AJJDC is a New York-based relief agency supporting essential welfare services amongst Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe and advising on community capacity-building, Jewish innovation, and leadership development.
- 5.4. The Head of Content @TopFilmTip [can corroborate claims on Abrams' tweets in a statement available upon request.](#)
- 5.5. Former Assignments Editor for the *Ha'aretz* Digital English Edition,
- 5.6. Alexander Kafka, 'Spies, Shtarkers, and Sex Gods: Film's New Jews', May 20, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/article/Spies-ShtarkersSex/131890/>. *The Chronicle's* audited Web-site traffic is more than 12.8 million pages a month, seen by more than 1.9 million unique visitors. The print newspaper is subscribed to by more than 64,000 academics and has a total readership of more than 315,000.
- 5.7. Oliver Gruner, 'Books: Review - *The New Jew in Film*. By Nathan Abrams', *The Camden New Journal*, 2 February 2012, <http://www.westendextra.com/reviews/books/2012/feb/books-review-new-jew-film-nathan-abrams>.
- 5.8. Alan Montague, 'Review: *The New Jew in Film*', *The Jewish Chronicle*, January 13, 2012, <http://www.thejc.com/arts/books/61928/review-the-new-jew-film>. *The Jewish Chronicle* (est. 1841, it is the world's oldest and most influential Jewish newspaper distributed in print and online via TheJC.com with approx. 112,000 readers), and independent journalists.
- 5.9. George Robinson, 'Jewish Princes Of Wales?', *The Jewish Week*, 14<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2012, [http://www.thejewishweek.com/special\\_sections/arts\\_preview/jewish\\_princes\\_wales](http://www.thejewishweek.com/special_sections/arts_preview/jewish_princes_wales).
- 5.10 'Representations of Jews changing in film (but only for Jews and only in film?) - (Books *The New Jew in Film* by Nathan Abrams)', *Bookeywookey: Literature good and bad, theater, and neuroscience....no really*, <http://bookeywookey.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/representations-of-jews-changing-in.html>, 21 Feb. 2012.