

Institution: Southampton Solent University
Unit of Assessment: 36. Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management
Title of case study: Tales of Narrative and Identity: Challenging Public Discourses Through Documentary Film
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>David Alamouti's documentary films have impacted on 'Civil Society', 'Cultural life' and 'Public Discourse' in the socio-political domain via innovative approaches to the documentary genre. His contribution to diaspora studies is internationally recognised and evidenced by several awards. Public benefit is claimed through stimulating public discourse, new approaches to creative practice, contributions to public fora policy debates, economic benefit via the creation of an acclaimed film production company: Contra-Image. Screenings of his work by the BBC, Al Jazeera, Sky and Russia 24, in addition to film festivals, have brought diverse and often antagonistic audiences together to debate highly sensitive issues.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Though relatively young, his work has had a significant impact on enhancing public understanding of social and cultural forms of diaspora and human courage in the face of extreme adversity. His outputs collectively share the desire to facilitate and foster debate concerned with how narrativisation is inevitably intertwined with power structures in the Foucauldian sense. As such he is committed to exploring new egalitarian approaches to narrative expression in documentary filmmaking. As a <i>research-as-practice</i> case study the underpinning research is embodied in the output. For example,</p> <p><i>Gilad and all that Jazz</i>, produced between 2009-2011, included a wide range of research methodologies such as archival mining, first person interviews, historical analysis, oral history, the use of written and visual testimonies, and semiotic reconfigurations. The pre-production research centred on the life story and ideas of Gilad Atzmon, the internationally renowned jazz musician, political activist and author. Within the films broader remit his story was located within Israeli identity politics and the occupation of Palestine. This resulted in the first documentary to tackle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through this type of prism and opened up a cultural and political debate that has long remained repressed.</p> <p><i>Boys with Broken Ears</i>, produced between 2011 and 2013, was motivated by the desire to represent and understand a neglected layer of Iranian society: its working class youth. In the last ten years Iran has emerged as a regional super-power at the centre of regional conflicts that have the potential to escalate. However, in a country where 70% are under 30 years of age and 90% of these are from working class families, the western mediated image of Iran remains Tehran and middle-class centric; the westernised individuals who make up 3% of the population. Using interviews, archival mining, historical and social analysis and documentation of events such as a world sporting championships, Alamouti produced the first ever film to gain intimate access to the ordinary working class youth living outside of Tehran. The research illuminated a layer of society that is not in favour of the Islamic regime, as many commentators have suggested, and who are deeply concerned by being held back by stifling poverty and government betrayal. Produced between 2008 and 2009, <i>The Citizens' Project</i> initiated research that led to the first global example of a web-documentary based on user-generated content. Its objective was to explore citizenship on a global scale and was made 3 years before Kevin Macdonald's YouTube produced "Life in a Day".</p>

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The project was underpinned by research that created new technical and procedural documentary filmmaking methods that solely used the Internet for all stages of the production (from pre-production planning and development through to distribution/exhibition). It also involved discursive investigations into modern citizenship concerned with finding a way to represent and understand the often spatially fixed concept of national identity through the increasingly de-territorialised medium of the world wide web. Collectively this *practise-as-research* method facilitated multiple directors from around the world and resulted in a prize-winning documentary filmic experienced delivered via the web.

The sense of collective nationhood was similarly explored in the research that informed *Voices of Courage*, produced in 2010 for the BBC. Again, a wide range of research methods from historiography to interviews and the analysis of archival data alongside qualitative accounts of personal testimonies from individuals underpinned a film that was a complex interrogation of space, place and identity. The research, based on socio-historic themes, ideas and discourses, informed the approach to the production which provided an alternative voice to the aggressive and xenophobic attitudes that were being expressed through some elements of the mainstream media on issues of asylum seeking.

Most recently Alamouti won a development grant from the Wellcome Trust (out of 120 projects) to further develop his next documentary “The Goodbye Club”, which explores the psychological experience of dying from a first person perspective. The project was the culmination of innovative interview methods and research skills and credentials that Alamouti acquired while working on *Gilad* and *All That Jazz* and *Boys With Broken Ears*.

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

Key outputs are all documentary film and media productions:

- 1) **The Citizens Project (Producer, 2009)** – an award-winning UGC web-doc that has played in festivals in the UK, Canada, Germany and won numerous awards (outlined below).
- 2) **Voices of Courage (Producer, 2010)** – Commissioned and Broadcast on the BBC’s Inside Out program in December 2010.
- 3) **Gilad and all that Jazz (Producer, 2012)** – Won best film at Utah film festival and has played many prestigious international festivals including Krakow and London. Broadcast by SKY, Al Jazeera International and Russia 24.
- 4) **Boys with Broken Ears (AKA: Too Young the Hero & AKA: Iran’s Sporting Dreamers) (Producer, 2013)** – Commissioned by Al Jazeera International and one of their most successful films of the year, also played at Leipzig and Fajr festivals and was Broadcast in Israel to big public acclaim by Israel’s biggest broadcaster.

These projects have been made possible by a variety of funds, grants, donations from philanthropic individuals, private investment and commissions from International broadcasters. The following is a table outlining the relevant information:

Who awarded to	Grant title	Sponsor	Period of Grant	Amount
David Alamouti	Commission	BBC	2010	£3,000

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David Alamouti	Investment	Ms. Kolahi	2010-2012	£26, 000
David Alamouti	Investment	Mr. Ave	2011-2013	£10,000
David Alamouti	Investment	Mr. Aramesh	2012	£1,000
David Alamouti	Commission- co-production	Al Jazeera International	2012	£16,100
David Alamouti	Donations	Iran Heritage Foundation	2012	£2,000
David Alamouti	Donations	Magic of Persia	2012	£1,000
David Alamouti	Donations	Crowd Sourcing	2011	£4,300

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

Alamouti’s production company Contra-Image is evidence of a beneficiary whereby a new business has been created and is a viable entity that is generating economic and cultural value. The projects have all secured international sales agents that have sold the films to various international territories, helping the films gain more viewers and audiences as well as generate more economic and cultural value. His films have had an impact on the awareness, attitudes and understanding of sections of the public both in the UK and internationally. His films have been shown across the world by major festivals and broadcasters including Krakow Film Festival, London International Doc Festival, Utah Film Festival, BBC, Al Jazeera, SKY, Russia 24, and Yes.

Gilad and all that Jazz won best documentary at the 2012 Utah Film Festival and was the most popular screening of the year at the prestigious Frontline Club, London. The screening attracted an audience consisting of ex-holocaust survivors, Palestinian victims and Zionists, which resulted in the most informative and open debates on the Palestinian question. The debate was continued to a global audience via a special program on the BBC world service. The film has been shown across the world, both on broadcast television, satellite TV, film festivals and is also available for download on Amazon video-on-demand.

Boys with Broken Ears was credited as one of Al Jazeera’s most popular documentaries and was shown on the biggest network in Israel, which resulted in substantial press coverage. The film had a massive impact on Israeli audiences who have never seen Iran portrayed in such a way. After every festival screening the film is followed by a debate, which enables audiences of all political persuasions to discuss their views. It has been selected to enter the best documentary completion at the prestigious Fajr Film Festival.

Alamouti’s work has also had a significant impact on film techniques associated with creative practice and artistic expression. *The Citizen’s-project*, which has won a handful of prizes at festivals such as Cambridge, Dresden and more, was a pioneering documentary in its use of web convergence and helped to foster a new way of making and distributing documentary film. The formal style of *Gilad and All That Jazz* layered a seemingly “normal” narrative biopic about a musician, with political analysis and discourse, which was an innovative way to explore identity politics and music in the same film.

The impact and success of these films have helped Alamouti and his company Contra-Image to secure regular commissions from international broadcasters and funding bodies; as well as to prepare a new round of projects that are more innovative and ground-breaking for 2013 through to 2015.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)**The Citizen's Project, (2009)**

This film won the Development Prize at the Cambridge Strawberry Super-8 Festival, 2007, and the Jury Prize at the Dresden Film Festival, 2007. It was also screened in the official selection category of Bristol Encounters Film Festival, One World Film Festival in Berlin, Flipside Film Festival UK and the Calgary Film Festival in Canada. An estimated 250,000 people have viewed the film since 2009. The creative use of the Internet and the pioneering methodologies have been reviewed on international filmmaking networks such as *Shooting People*.

Voices of Courage (2010)

The film was screened on the BBC *Inside Out* Program (Southern), and BBC I-player (national) in December 2010. The Film was viewed by an estimated 35,000 people on terrestrial TV and a further 8,400 via the I-player.

Gilad and all that Jazz (2011)

Viewing figures for the film come from an amalgamation of TV & satellite broadcasts, festivals and screenings, DVD and VOD purchases and media coverage. The film was bought by Al Jazeera, SKY and Russia 24. Between them they broadcast in every continent across the globe and to nearly 1 billion people. It is estimated that across all their platforms (TV, Web, Mobile and proxy sites) *Gilad and all that Jazz* would have been viewed by nearly 1.8 million people across all continents of the globe. The film has also been seen by a further 10,000 people who have been present at one of the festival or tour screenings that has taken place across the five continents, or bought the film via Amazon VOD.

One of the screenings was recorded and uploaded to the web:

See link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz7MGOQdoEY>

The film was also the subject a lot of reviews including a BBC world radio program

See link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=x4eSH2tq67w

Boys with Broken Ears (AKA Too Young The Hero) (2012)

This film has been viewed by an estimated 1.1 million people across the five continents. It was one of Al Jazeera's most successful films, generating huge debates and feedback via their website. It was also broadcast in Israel where it received a lot of press and coverage for its portrayal of the youth of Iran.

Being a relatively new film, its festival life has only just started. It has so far played in competition at the Fajr film festival.