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Documentary practice as radical process in challenging dominant media and state narratives

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Documentary Practice as Radical Process in Challenging Dominant Media and State Narratives

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Critical Appraisal submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy on the Basis of Published Work.

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Abstract

This critical appraisal of the submitted work outlines my position within radical documentary film making from *Britain's Black Legacy* (1991) to *Burn* (2014). Exploring the works in relation to the political concerns during the periods of the time of practice, the notion of an uncompromising 'documentary of force' develops throughout the portfolio.

Moving from broadcast interventions, thorough Third Cinema practices and explorations of 'poetic testimonies' the works use a hybrid of documentarist modes determined by the context of the time. A praxis develops using documentary film to utilise strategies of political, cultural, and cinematic interventions to build on latent militancy and challenge dominant media and state narratives on the core issues of race, class and state violence. In defining a 'documentary of force' it posits a form of resistance using film as a tool to force debate and political change, as demanded by the films participants.

The approach taken is an explicitly partisan form of filmmaking where the maker jointly instigates direct actions, collaborating with the film participants, and the Gramscian notion of the organic intellectual is explored through these contributors. The importance of the embedded film activist is made clear in a methodology of trust, built over 23 years of collaborations.

The praxis seeks to move the issues of concern in the films from the peripheral to the central. The attempts by the state to suppress the work, to make it compliant, is a structural process and the marginalisation of the work in the portfolio, the negotiations with broadcasters and elements of the state, and the film makers confrontational approach, are all examined. The contribution of the work to the documentary field is documented across a range of outputs, citations and articles. Its effectiveness to implement policy change, as well as its impact on broadcast documentaries, is also explored.

“Defiance is resistance, and resistance is the beginning of being.”

Mahmoud Darwish

The power of factual film to inspire action and agitate for radical change has developed hand in hand with social struggles and mass movements for several decades. The portfolio presented is posited as a praxis of a ‘documentary of force’, outlining its contribution to documentary filmmaking.

Documentary is the fusion of art and reality, and the balance between the two varies within documentary modes and their hybrids. On examining the portfolio of work, including the ground-breaking, controversial films, *After the Storm* (1992), *Justice Denied* (1994), and *Injustice* (2001), complex questions of subjectivity, censorship and ethics emerge. This work attempts to challenge conventional documentary through the radical position of the filmmaker. Throughout the body of work, the coherent approach is ‘documentary practice as a radical process in challenging the dominant media and state narratives’. The portfolio largely focuses on the representation of political struggles for justice in the UK. Explorations of resistance, race and class from a community perspective are documented over three decades, employing a ‘documentary of force’ research method. It is a praxis summed up by the Dziga-Vertov Group: ‘The problem is not to make *political* films but to make films *politically*’.¹

¹ Godard, Jean-Luc. (1970)

Framing the Approach

The elements of an initial framework of a 'documentary of force', gleaned through reflection on and analysis of the outputs, can be defined as a concern for:

1. **Process Journalism** - working with groups of people over long periods of time in an embedded praxis that works against the Monoform as defined by Watkins.²

2. **Impact** - measured by results from cultural practice when disseminated. *Towards a Third Cinema*³ is a text that offers a blueprint for operating towards making the maximum impact. Measuring impact is *political*, as manifested by the state's response to the film outputs, as displayed by the media, NGOs and government.

3. **Approach** - examining specific issues in terms of race and class but from a central ideology of resistance. This includes an explicit rejection of Wolfgang⁴ and what I would term the 'state of victimology', where victims become held responsible for their own deaths.

4. **Formations** – the development of the organic intellectual in the filmmaker and the participants. This Gramscian⁵ model defines their connectivity within the filmmaking process.

² Watkins, Peter. (2004)

³ Getino, Octavio and Solanas, Fernando. (1971)

⁴ Wolfgang, Martin. (1957)

⁵ Gramsci, Antonio. (1971) The concept of the organic intellectual is defined in this text.

Connectivity

I have chosen to adopt a mainly chronological approach in this paper, for a number of reasons. This includes the organic connectivity between subjects in the outputs presented as well as the trajectory of how the work contributes and changes the field of documentary within which it positions itself. In considering impact, I examine how the practice contributes to changes in the field in terms of documentary production and political impact, as typified by *Injustice*, on which Bourne comments:

One of the most significant, independent, political films made in the UK was *Injustice* – about black deaths in custody from 1993–1999. Despite attempts by the police to suppress the film and refusal by television to show it, it was eventually screened in hundreds of community venues, cinemas and won many awards at film festivals. Ultimately it was viewed by the Attorney General, who then called for a review of decision-making over prosecutions.⁶

The production methods employed in the portfolio exist as a hybrid of documentary modes, as outlined by Nichols.⁷ This hybridity has been formed through an evolving research methodology that places the film participants as central to the development of a creative and political process. The research practice employed requires a passage

⁶ Bourne, Jenny. (2015)

⁷ Nichols, Bill. (2001) Nichols defines six documentary modes: expository, poetic, reflective, participatory, performative and observational.

of time, seven years in the case of one of the outputs, to act as a catalyst in recording the forming of the film participants into 'organic intellectuals', as defined by Gramsci.

'Radical' filmmaking, also sometimes referred to as 'Activist' or 'Oppositional' filmmaking, tends to refer to a practice whereby the political opinions and approach of the filmmakers are more subjective than tends to be the case in the dominant mainstream documentaries. These various approaches are broadly defined as left-wing by Presence.⁸

Words themselves are sites of struggle and I therefore often describe the films here simply as 'radical' or 'explicitly political' as much as 'oppositional', with my usage of these words being part of that struggle for meaning. While 'underground' is a suitable way of describing some of the less-than-legal organisational tactics of the radical left, it is also suggestive of the mainstream portrayal of radical politics as illegitimate.

The works presented here act deeply as *interventions* in 'dominant' and 'activist' filmmaking across the range of their distribution and impact. My television production grew out of an activist approach to the documentation of a political reality that challenged the accepted perceptions on war, race, immigration and policing. However, the interventions were never intended as alternative points of view and, in fact, were always positioned as reflecting the *vox populi*. The appeal of documentaries was always directed towards the majority of people rather than a

⁸ Presence, Steve. (2013)

leftist or liberal audience. In fact, the attempts of left-liberals to influence the core issues of the films, such as deaths in police custody, became a battleground of contention within the production and distribution of the work.

When exploring earlier outputs, there is some contextualisation of the socio-political conditions at the time of distribution. Today, the core issues in these works - race, immigration, policing - have moved to the centre, in terms of public debate and awareness.

Commitment

Employing the approach of 'process journalism' as a praxis leads to a complexity of materials in which time becomes a key factor not just in the concrete terms of production but also in the construction of the film's message and targeted impact. The building of a relationship of trust and the interactivity between the position of filmmaker and activist display a long-term commitment to the film subjects and research participants. One of the earliest influences of this approach was *Shoah* (1985) by Claude Lanzmann. Over nine hours in length, the film presents Lanzmann's interviews with survivors, witnesses and perpetrators during visits to German Holocaust sites across Poland, including concentration camps.

The 'talking head' has become a documentary paradigm of mainstream production, so the decision to use this method is worth probing. Within the context of a radical process of questioning the role of the filmmaker and the filmmaking process, it became necessary to allow the participants to play a central role both as the subject as well as delivering the intellectual voice of the films. The inclusion of lengthy testimonies, involving interviews lasting for several minutes without cutaways or rapid editing, allows the audience to engage in the film and actively consider what is being said. This is the antithesis of the dominant media documentary's timing. Maintaining an interview on screen for longer than is conventional gives power to the interviewee and is an editing strategy. Editorial decision-making is political and, importantly, emotionally confrontational in nature.

Developing long-term relationships is central to the filmmaking approach. As an example, one of the participants, Myrna Simpson the mother of Joy Gardner who died during police restraint in 1993, appears in the outputs *Justice Denied* (1994), *Injustice* (2001) and *Burn* (2014). There is a process at play in which the participants have a vested interest in the research and its dissemination and so become central players in the debate and dialogue of the outputs. Gramsci writes of the organic intellectual being "in active participation in practical life, a constructor, organiser, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator".⁹ Myrna Simpson played that role within the community following her daughter's death and, at several points in

⁹ Gramsci, Antonio. (1971)

the film, her words clearly reflect the longevity of this position. Cooper notes this in relation to *Injustice* and the context of the attempts to suppress the film:

The voices silenced in the present broadcasting landscape aren't so much those of the film-makers as of people like Myrna Simpson. 'You don't know the pain, you don't know the suffering, you don't know how I've cried. My tears will catch them. My tears will catch them.'¹⁰

Mainstream documentary is dominated by a transient relationship between filmmaker and subject which is generally exploitative in nature. There are exceptions constituting a more dedicated approach, where subjects are revisited. The work of John Pilger, for example, exemplifies the political commitment to a cause over lengthy periods. Patricio Guzman is also an important figure in this respect. His oeuvre, from *The Battle for Chile* (1975) to *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010) displays an archive of a political struggle for the liberty of a country from dictatorship through to national reconciliation. Guzman regards documentary practice as a 'great archive of humanity'. The act of remembrance is a common national event to mark those who have died in conflict. Time is stopped for a brief moment of reflection. The body of films here acts in a similar way, as they become time capsules for actively remembering victims – of war, of police brutality and of state killings.

¹⁰ Cooper, Adrian. (2001)

Visualising Resistance

The work developed in a period of viewing internationalist cinema and the influence of visual styles ranges from Godard to Akerman. Within the portfolio, this is explored through *Po Po* (2013), within which the lack of prosecutions of police officers for custody deaths is challenged in a poetic and political analysis of state violence. *Newspeak* (2011) is an experimental documentary essayist film centred around censorship, war and resistance.

The notion of a 'documentary of force', inherent in the praxis, moves from radical activism through to experiments, with essayistic and reflective work exploring images and sounds of resistance. Daney addresses the hegemony of the *visual* as a pictorial universe from advertising to television news as opposed to the *image*:

The visual is without reverse shot, it lacks nothing, it is closed, looped, a little like the image of pornographic spectacle, which is only the ecstatic verification of the working of organs (and nothing more). As for the image – this image we loved in cinema to the point of obscenity – the situation would be rather the contrary. The image always takes place at the border of two force fields, it is meant to bear witness to a certain otherness; and although it always has a hard core, it always lacks something. The image is always more and less than itself.¹¹

¹¹ Daney, Serge. (2006)

It is to the role of bearing witness with images, of archiving struggle, that the body of work contributes. The practice of collective organising, of using film as an agitational tool remains important, if less frequent, today as Daney states:

Not only is the image becoming rare; it is also becoming a form of stubborn resistance, or a touching memory, within a universe of pure 'signalization'.¹²

Defining Identity

Moving onto the work itself, one of the most important decisions made at the outset is the political stance adopted in all of the films of documenting resistance as the central narrative.

The chronology of the work presented begins with the founding of Migrant Media Collective in 1989. The group emerged after the 'Workshop Movement' of the mid-80's, the aim of which was to act as a centre for film production, distribution, education and exhibition.¹³ Most of the workshops had been in existence for some time and been in receipt of support from a range of sources, including Channel 4, the local authorities and the BFI. These workshops were focussed on specific communities of interest concerned with issues of race, class and gender. They

¹² Ibid

¹³ The 1982 ACTT workshop declaration provided financial security and new audiences for independent film and video workshops.

included Black Audio Film Collective, Ceddo, Derry Film & Video Collective, Amber and Despite TV. Arriving after this movement, we were unable to secure the support that had existed previously, but we wished to follow what was essentially a Marxist form of organisation where we would control the means of production and have an influence on distribution.

We formed Migrant Media as self-taught filmmakers who had also been engaged in political research and activism in our communities, primarily comprising those that came to the UK from the 1970's onwards. The unifying factor was a need to tell stories that were not being told. We had a very strong sense of coming from countries with backgrounds of liberation struggle and also of sharing some of the experiences of earlier Black and Asian communities.¹⁴ The collective's diversity reflected the post-colonial and anti-imperialist as well as neo-colonial realities. These were the children of the Windrush generation, the settled migrant communities from the 1970's and political asylum-seekers from the Arab world and Africa. What was shared was a common experience that was politically based in resistance. This certainly translated into our approach as well as our need to establish the identity of the group.

¹⁴ Hall, Stuart. (1997).

Britain's Black Legacy (Output 1)

Alexander Kluge's work is concerned with using the capacity of film as an instrument for pure research.¹⁵ This notion of a "utopia of film" is part of a research process that led to the production of three films in the *Communities of Resistance* series, which featured *Britain's Black Legacy* (1991), *Germany – the Other Story* (1991) and *Sweet France* (1992), all co-directed with Mogniss Abdallah from Agence Im'Media, a collective of journalists and activists based in Paris with which we built a strategic working relationship.

Our interest was in the collision between culture, politics and society and in presenting a reality that has been hitherto ignored. Researching resistance, and documenting it, was our "utopia of film" and a response to the narrow limitations of the discussion of race in Europe in the media at that time. In 1990, the Schengen Convention was being implemented to remove internal border controls in a number of European countries and this was having a negative impact on settled migrant communities whose experience of Schengen was tantamount to Fortress Europe. *Communities of Resistance* was our response to this, which documented self-defence against racist attacks in the UK, Germany and France. Furthermore, it led to a network of activist screenings and engagement that was centred around *The International*

¹⁵ Kluge, Alexander. (1964)

Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books where the films were screened, discussed and disseminated.¹⁷

During the 1980's, the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher had sought to grant the police increased powers. There was societal racism, discrimination and poverty. This led to a series of uprisings, including Brixton, Toxteth and Moss Side in 1982 and Handsworth, Brixton and Tottenham in 1985, all of which challenged the authoritarian government. The crisis was very real, and these themes of race, crime and youth were our concerns. Hall notes:

How these themes have functioned as a mechanism for the construction of an authoritarian consensus, a conservative backlash: what we call the slow build up to a 'soft' law-and-order society.¹⁸

When we began production, race was marginalised in the political debate in the UK and was not examined from a Pan-European perspective. Our work sought to challenge this status quo. Theorists including Sontag, Said and Berger influenced our methodology and practice. We were politically engaged and part of a group of radical activists and cultural workers within specific communities, organising around issues of race, nationally and liberation struggles, internationally, as embedded documentarists. The value of this was our ability to influence and document specific

¹⁷ The International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books, London. 1982-1995. Bringing together a number of Black publishers, intellectuals and educationalists. The ethos of the Book Fair was "to mark the new and expanding phase in the growth of radical ideas and concepts, and their expression in literature, politics, music, art and social life".

¹⁸ Hall, Stuart. (1978)

events as the work developed, as manifested later, for example, in *Tasting Freedom* (1994) and *Injustice*. In the very early stages, we were building what Farocki terms a compound system:

Following the example of the steel industry, in which every waste product flow back into the production process and almost no energy is lost, I try to compound my works.¹⁹

This system of production ensured that research, activism, film screenings and production were not simply interrelated but became part of the 'documentary of force' in terms of motivating the direction of the collective, and we defined ourselves as migrants for political reasons, as outlined by Anderson.²⁰

One of the most important decisions taken was to employ a methodology of archiving the experiences of our communities by frequently gathering research and testimonies. It was a process that sought to document a collective experience rather than produce media outputs. This experience we defined as the resistance to racism, police abuse, immigration raids, deportation and the functioning of self-defence groups.²¹ The working relationship with Agence Im'Media with *Communities of Resistance* had a fundamental influence on this approach. Moving the margins to the centre and building radical communities were central to their documentary process and ethos.

¹⁹ Farocki, Harun. (1975)

²⁰ See Anderson, Bridgette. (2013)

²¹ See for example 'Statement from the Bradford 12' (1981) in Ramamurthy, Anandi. (2013)

Hall²² states: “those who rule, 'besides having to constitute their power in the form of the state, have to give their will a universal expression as the will of the state, as law”. Much of the work presented in this portfolio examines how the will of the state in law, as exercised by the impunity afforded to police violence, has been experienced and challenged. A substantial proportion of the portfolio presented constitutes documentaries on the issue of police violence, sometimes explored through ‘poetic testimonies’, as exemplified in the films *Burn* and *Po Po*. This reflectivity and poetics within a politically charged approach were influenced by Akomfrah, Godard and Marker, amongst others.²³ Although it adopted a different visual approach, a keystone of my work is *Injustice*, which focuses on the struggle for justice by the families of those who have died in police custody. A film with extensive accolades, a national cinema distribution and international television sales, it was nevertheless banned by UK broadcasters.

Prominent as an oppositional auteur, and an influential theorist on my work, is Peter Watkins. His films present radical ideas in a praxis that is critical of how the mass media exclude the participation – thought and action – of the audience. His theory around on Monoform is important in understanding the fault lines in the mass media that we have exploited for maximum impact. Watkins refers to the dominance of the ‘Monoform’ as a construct that is serving Mass Audio Visual Media (MAVM).²⁴

²² Hall, Stuart. (1978)

²³ See Brancaleone, David. (2012) for a detailed analysis of Godard and Markers intervention in the art world.

²⁴ Wakins, Peter. (2010)

Because of its extreme rapidity, the Monoform gives no time for interaction, reflection or questioning. Its dense layering of sound, its lack of silence (except for manipulative purposes), is again hostile to reflection. The rapidly edited images are like small railway cars, and the rails they run on the monolinear narrative structure as originally developed by Hollywood and designed to move the story (the message) in a pre-determined line (pre-determined by the producers, not the public), rising and falling between impact points to a final climax and termination.²⁵

Challenging the Monoform constitutes part of my own radical practice, not just in terms of the editorial rhythms of the films, but also through direct intervention. This included the 'protest projection' of *Injustice* onto the side of the Channel 4 building following the refusal by broadcasters to screen the film.²⁶ *The War Game* (1965), a docu/drama by Watkins exploring the cataclysmic effect of a nuclear war on Britain, based largely on government documents of the time, was banned by the BBC, who deemed it "too horrifying for the medium of broadcasting".²⁷ Despite winning the Oscar for Best Documentary, it was not broadcast in the UK until 1985, so there may be hope of a UK broadcast of *Injustice* yet.

This connection between the impact of the dominance of the Monoform and the core issue of state violence is expressed through what Zizek terms 'fetishist disavowal'.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Azeez, Wale. (2003)

²⁷ Hamilton, William. (1965) See question by Hamilton to Secretary of State for Home Department on pressure exerted on the BBC in National Archive.

²⁸ Zizek, Slavoj. (2009)

This can be summed up by the mantra “I know, but I don’t want to know that I know, so I don’t know”. This acceptance of state violence makes possible the acquiescence of the public. Mainstream media offer this deniability but there are fractures, and there is an overall strategy in the portfolio to confront this in an effective way. The exploitation of these fault lines makes an important contribution to the debate.

The numbers game (‘how many died?’) forms the nucleus of many of the films within the portfolio. The deniability of objective figures was to raise its head in my first documentary commission for the UK.

After The Storm (Output 2)

Migrant Media focussed strongly on the experiences of the Arab communities. Filmmakers from Iraq, Lebanon and Algerian were embedded within the Arab community, with participants connected to a large network of artists, radicals, and political groupings, including exiles. On the basis of *Britain’s Black Legacy*, we were given our first broadcast commission, for the BBC *Birthrights*²⁹ series. The BBC was interested in documenting the story of the settled Arab communities.

Our methodology had built a significant collection of primary research that painted a very different picture to the imagery of rich Sheiks and despots that dominated the

²⁹ *Birthrights* was BBC2 documentary series of 6 programmes on “Culture and identity from a variety of black perspectives” and transmitted in 1992.

media narrative at the time, which formed part of the legacy of orientalism, as defined by Said:

Modern Orientalism embodies a systematic discipline of accumulation. Far from this being exclusively an intellectual or theoretical feature, it made Orientalism tend fatally towards the systematic accumulation of human beings and territories.³⁰

The requirements of the BBC were asynchronous with our anti-imperialist agenda. What began as a 'soft' programme on ethnic diversity grew into an anti-war film, as the 1991 Gulf War was taking place, and this affected our praxis significantly. We were documenting opinions on the war *as it progressed*. It was impossible to ignore this lived experience, particularly the impact it had on our film participants, which was very different to how the rest of the country was experiencing it. Daney states:

It seems to me that, all throughout this war, there has been one lacking image: Baghdad beneath the bombs. An image whose absence has even forced us all to 'imagine' something, based on our opinions, our phantasms, or our memories of war movies.³¹

I developed a keen interest in the power of images of conflict. The Gulf War was presented in its imagery as a surgical operation. Gone were the days of televised wars

³⁰ Said, Edward. (1977)

³¹ Daney, Serge. (2006)

first marked in Vietnam. Military footage of ‘smart’ bombs hitting targets was rolled out to win over public opinion in support of the war and all information was controlled by the military. It was not until the release of Iraqi state television pictures of the aftermath of the Al-Amiriyah shelter bombing by the US air force, during which 400 civilians lost their lives, that questions began to arise regarding the lack of imagery but by then the major damage had been done.

Daney continues:

Arguably, this war *had* to degenerate for everyone to see to what extent our ‘right to information’ was in the wrong hands, but more numerous were those who, on the contrary – proudly impervious to the divine surprise of a new world order and the justification for this war – were happy to see it won ‘surgically’ and without pictures, rather than ‘dirtily’ and exposed to everyone’s eyes.³²

One aspect of the film was to take news images and ‘read’ them through the eyes of our participants; for example, by explaining the symbolic meaning of the Euphrates and the visceral reaction to seeing the bombing of Baghdad. The film presents the *difference in looking* for a Palestinian watching the destruction of an Arab city established in the 8th Century, which adds an emotional force to the imagery, an emotion that was missing from the television coverage of this event. The key last line in the film, where Reem Abdelhadi asks the audience, “What are you afraid of?”, is a

³² Ibid.

question but also a demand that the audience search within themselves, outside the shadow of Orientalism.

The film was delivered to the BBC, checked for compliance, approved and scheduled for broadcast. Our commissioning editor then informed us of an issue that could prevent transmission. One of our filmed interviewees, Dr Ghada Karmi, had made the statement that “100,000 Iraqis had died during the Gulf War and that nobody seemed to care about it in the UK”. The MOD figure for Iraqi deaths was 10,000, which was accepted across all mainstream news media. The figure was political and intended to play down the number of deaths, making the war more acceptable to the public. We were told that we would need to cut the interview. We refused. The statement that the interviewee made came from a source that the BBC could not question. I asked Dr Karmi to provide its origin and it proved to have emanated from the Pentagon. The BBC had no choice but to relent and the film was broadcast, with the figure included. Shortly after transmission, the Channel Controller informed us that we would not be receiving any more commissions from the BBC. That remains the case today. The important lesson here was that empirical research is fundamental when challenging state narratives.

In the rest of the outputs, particularly *Injustice*, this approach became a core strength. Empirical research in recording the number of deaths, and the decision to publish outputs that directly incite libel challenges, form part of the strategy of impact that the films have engendered. Reaction to the films, including state interventions and

criticism ranging from legal challenges to threats of actual bodily harm to the filmmaker, provide evidence of the effectiveness of our approach.

Tasting Freedom (Output 3)

I was able to capitalise on *After the Storm* by gaining a commission from Channel 4 for *Tasting Freedom*. In the early 1990's, the UK Government was operating an unofficial 'detention as a deterrent' policy,³³ targeting specific refugee communities in an attempt to discourage applications and entry to the UK. The *Front Islamic Salvation* on the upsurge in Algeria and Mobutu's regime in Zaire were factors that led to an increase in the number of asylum-seekers, whom we had been working with in regard to anti-deportation. I initiated the *Campaign Against Immigration Act Detentions*,³⁴ which led to a national conference in the form of a *People's Tribunal*. We instigated private meetings with community activists and built a strategy to challenge the Home Office. It was agreed that those being held in detention centres and prisons would go on hunger strike and that we would act as their press unit, issuing statements smuggled out by the heavily-restricted hunger strikers for the mainstream media. This strategy was agreed and implemented. This was a more active approach to research. Whereas previously I had participated in movements and the narratives had developed in conjunction with these, this was the first time that the narrative was instigated by the filmmaker. This was a new development in

³³ Foucault, Michel. (1995)

³⁴ The *Campaign Against Immigration Act Detentions* was a community-based coalition including South Asia Solidarity, Community of Zairian refugees, Algerian Refugee Centre and Migrant Media between 1991-95.

the process of a 'documentary of force', which also involved assisting the release of detainees through direct action. The critical development of a politico-cultural production process moves from an embedded documentarist with a long-term commitment to also include direct intervention.

The film was a targeted challenge of government policy and was broadcast on Channel 4 at primetime, leading to a statement in the House of Commons by the Home Office Minister Charles Wardle. The political impact of the hunger strike and the film soon led to the release of over 300 detainees who had previously been defined as 'bogus'. The embedded radical activist approach used a methodology that was able to have a very direct impact on the issue.

Tasting Freedom was part of the *Critical Eye* series for Channel 4. The core experience of this production, coming after the decline of the Workshop Movement and the shift of Channel 4 to a more populist, commercial output, served as a strong basis for the later development of a number of documentaries. Despite this shift, we were still able to make interventions through the support of the channel:

There is a common misconception that the broadcast of oppositional documentary on Channel 4 took place almost exclusively in the 1980s, a period of radicalism on the channel especially associated with *The Eleventh-Hour* series (1982-9). However, Channel 4 in fact continued to provide a platform for radical documentary until well into the 1990s. *Critical Eye* (1990-4) was the most prominent series in this respect, broadcasting low-budget, activist-

oriented oppositional documentary to hundreds of thousands of people throughout the first half of the decade.³⁵

Presence describes the subsequent landscape of activist filmmaking, citing many of the films that feature in this thesis, including *Injustice*, *Newspeak*, *Justice Denied* and *Who Polices the Police?* He goes on to outline how this body of work could be considered as radical, activist as well as oppositional.³⁶

Justice Denied (Output 4)

One of the advantages of the embedded documentarist is the gathering of research across issues that then develop into a film project. The strength of the work lay in the exclusivity of the proven access. This was the basis for the production of *Justice Denied*. During the production of *Tasting Freedom*, Joy Gardner had died in North London, when police and deportation officers used force to restrain her, tying her with a body belt and ankle straps and gagging her with 13 feet of tape. A trial ensued. Three police officers were charged with manslaughter and all were found not guilty. The film was broadcast the day after the trial, at 9:00pm on Channel 4. The film was as much about the death as it was about the struggle of Joy's family against the

³⁵ Presence, Steve. (2013)

³⁶ Ibid.

government and explored the story from the point of view of her family, a position that, up until then, had been largely excluded from the mainstream media.

There was an extremely negative reaction to the film, including the issuing of death threats to the filmmaker. In addition, the commissioning editors at Channel 4 expressed regret at the screening of the film (despite having approved it through the compliance process). I had to appear on *Right to Reply* to defend the programme against public criticism, without the broadcaster's support, which was unusual. The extreme racial stereotyping of Joy Gardner in the press and media, from redtops to broadsheets, had painted a picture of a violent black woman, and this became the dominant state narrative. *Justice Denied* adopted a different viewpoint so, as we had shattered the illusions of the image of Joy Gardner that the police and media had established, an overreaction was inevitable.³⁷

As the threats subsided, Channel 4 apologised privately to the police, without our knowledge. I was informed that we would not receive any further commissions of this nature and should instead focus on ethnic lifestyle programmes. It was decided that this advice would be ignored as it conflicted with the trajectory of my engagement.

Current academic research into deaths in police custody has increased remarkably since the advent of the Black Live Matter movement in the US and its later

³⁷ Baker, Stephanie. (2014)

manifestation in the UK. The historical reluctance of academia and the mainstream media to investigate this issue in the UK is striking. Very few films have ever been produced that presented research let alone challenged the state narratives regarding deaths in police custody. It could be argued that the acquiescence of the mainstream media on this issue has placed it in a position of being culpable with the state. By failing to engage in the debate due to considerations of objectivity and legal compliance, it becomes collusion. Solanas and Getino:

Truth, then, amounts to subversion. Any form of expression or communication that tries to show national reality is subversion.³⁸

Even in its most liberal phase, Channel 4 had made few films about police custody deaths - just three in its 33-year existence. These included *The People's Account* (1986) by Ceddo,³⁹ *Mysteries of July* (1991) by Black Audio Film Collective,⁴⁰ and, finally, *Justice Denied*.

³⁸ Getino, Octavio and Solanas, Fernando. (1971)

³⁹ See Ogidi, Ann. (2003) for a brief outline of Ceddo.

⁴⁰ See Akomfrah, John. (1983) and Auguiste, Recce. (1989) about BAFC's approach.

Injustice (Output 5)

This project is a substantive piece of research that took seven years to produce and concerned the struggles for justice by the families of those who have died in police custody. It grew directly out of the production of *Justice Denied*, with empirical research exposing the number of custody deaths over a 30-year period as being in excess of 1000.

There had never been any figures available as no news producers, broadcasters or academics had ever undertaken a simple calculation. That figure itself was shocking and forms the basis for the rest of the film that explored some of the stories. The fact that the figures had not been collated before was symptomatic of the reluctance to deal with the issue as a systemic problem that needed to be articulated in documentary form in a forceful way. The intervention based on our research, in this respect, was trilateral. Firstly, the empirical presentation of facts regarding the deaths figure had a significant *journalistic impact*. Secondly, the *emotional impact* content of the interviews was presented as a chronology of struggle and resistance. Thirdly, the use of a confrontational approach (the decision to name and show the officers accused of killing) was intended to raise the issue in the legal arena in order for it to create a *political impact*. These three areas coalesced into what amounted to a call to arms, in filmic terms.

One of the key moments of the film occurs during the opening sequence, when the wife of Olwashiji Lapite enters Stoke Newington Police Station. Her husband had been killed by officers from that station only two days earlier. In the film, she falls to the floor, asking, “Why should they kill? Why? Why? Why?” We see and hear her pain rather than the image of the dead and it is this emotion and how it fits into the sequence that calls to mind what the painter Francis Bacon said about the power of his work resting in his obsession to “paint the screen rather than the horror”.⁴¹

When discussing *a documentary of force*, one of the most important considerations that differentiates this from more conventional documentary modes is the measurement of the state reaction to the film. In September 2001, the film’s premiere at the Metro Cinema in London was halted at the last minute due to threats of litigation by police officers. One of the political strategies we employed was the decision to frame custodial deaths as human rights abuses. The use of this term was deliberate, and it is important to establish the context at that time. The media coverage of human rights abuses was always in reference to countries outside the UK, so our decision to even refer to these deaths as human rights abuses was a radical one. It was the reading of Malcom X, and his attempt to take the case of Afro-Americans to the United Nations, that influenced a position on this:

⁴¹ Deleuze, Gilles. (2003)

We believe that our problem is one not one of civil rights but a violation of human rights. Not only are we denied the right to be a citizen in the United States, we are denied the right to be a human being.⁴²

A national position of acceptance of abuse had become so entrenched that any mainstream media scrutiny of state wrongdoing on the issue was transitory and ineffectual. Reframing the issue as human rights abuses rather than an issue for civil society was designed to challenge the inertia and provoke a response from the media. It worked.

In pursuing this trajectory, we invited the embassies of several countries that the UK had accused of human rights abuses, including Iran, Cuba and China, all of whom attended the premier. Their presence was an important strategy in establishing alliances and maximising the political impact, and the police's threat of litigation certainly shocked the audience at that time. On the night of the planned screening at the Metro Cinema, the cinema owner received a fax from solicitors representing the police officer who had been accused of murder. It stated: "Should your screening go ahead, our clients will have no hesitation in pursuing their rights against your company for very substantial damages that will then be their only means of compensation and vindication".⁴³ The screening was cancelled by the cinema. Defending the position of the film on BBC News that evening, it became clear that we were drawing battle lines around the documentary:⁴⁴

⁴² See Malcolm X on Front Page Challenge, 1965: CBC Archives.

⁴³ Letter from Russell, Jones and Walker Solicitors to Eva Kirkhope at the Metro Cinema 6 July 2001.

⁴⁴ See BBC Newsroom South East for live appearance by filmmaker. July 6 2001. London

BBC News anchor: Is there controversial material obviously likely to incur legal action in your film?

Ken Fero: If you call telling the truth controversial then yes there is. In the film the families speak very openly about how they feel about the officers that killed their loved ones.

BBC News anchor: But so, it sounds to me there are obvious risks and dangers about this film, you are going to go back and look at it again are you?

Ken Fero: No, we are not going to go back and look at it again we made this film to give a voice to the families that have been silenced everywhere else, so we are not going to re-cut the film. The film is going to be shown in this country, we are going to show it next week and we have had calls from Iran, from the US from Africa from people who want to see this film to show the film and the truth will come out. You can't silence the people forever.

After the Metro Cinema pulled the film, there was a decision to make between negotiating with the authorities to make the film 'compliant' or going ahead with publishing it. The film was made independently and we were not obliged to comply so the second planned screening went ahead, again not without controversy. The audience occupied the hall, leading to the headline: 'Audience Hijacks hall to see death in custody film':

An audience took over Conway Hall in central London and defied threats of legal action, so they could see a controversial film which names eight police officers as being responsible for the deaths of people in custody. Police were called

when about 150 people barricaded themselves in the hall last night and took over the projector to ensure the screening of the movie, called *Injustice*, went ahead.⁴⁵

The film went against rules of compliance and named and showed police officers, directly accusing them of murder. The decision taken was that the right to life was more important than the law of libel. Continuing litigation threats by police officers led to samizdat screenings across the country.⁴⁶

The fact that none of the police officers involved had been convicted of these deaths was the issue that the film raised, and the imperative was to allow the families to speak. *Injustice* documents the horrific loss of life at the hands of the state and its attempts to cover up these killings.⁴⁷ The impact of the filming process was to simultaneously form the *United Families & Friends Campaign*, the coalition of death in custody family campaigns, that then became an important national force. The political actions of the families were influenced by the need to create public spectacles that could draw attention to the issue. Led primarily by the women in the families, much of the actuality within the film, including pickets, meetings and confrontations, was agreed and engendered between the family campaigners and the filmmakers. Coalescing the family campaigns on the basis that 'unity is strength' was an underlying activity of the filmmaker for several years. Towards the end of this period, the decision to organise a national procession in 1999 also provided an

⁴⁵ Ramsay, A. (2001)

⁴⁶ Cooper, Adrian. (2001).

⁴⁷ Hattenstone, Simon. (2001)

opportunity to end the film with symbolically striking images of the mothers of the victims marching to the seat of power to present their demands to the Prime Minister.

Injustice was made without negotiation with the police, outside the broadcast regulations, on the margins of economics and operating externally to the industrial structures of television. Its ability to make a significant political, cultural and social impact nevertheless was the result of an important methodology. We instigated screenings of the work, despite the legal threats issued, with the intention of provoking political action. This notion of provocation was built on the lessons of Third Cinema:

Every image that documents, bears witness to, refutes or deepens the truth of a situation is something more than a film image or purely artistic fact; it becomes something which the System finds indigestible. Testimony about a national reality is also an inestimable means of dialogue and knowledge on the world plane.⁴⁸

Injustice became a multi-awarding winning, internationally-renowned film that is today defined as a 'classic' documentary.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Getino, Octavio and Solanas, Fernando. (1971)

⁴⁹ Bradshaw, Peter. (2012)

Ideologies

There were constant ideological battles between us and left-liberal organisations. When producing *Tasting Freedom*, for example, several lawyers at the Refugee Legal Centre attempted to dissuade their clients from embarking on the hunger strike and threatened to withdraw their legal support if they did not comply. In the case of *Injustice*, left and liberal groups had dominated the individual justice campaigns. We helped to construct the United Families & Friends Campaign, a coalition of family campaigns, as an important strategy. From a political perspective, the families became the vanguard and was far less easily mediated than had been the case previously. This was the reason why it became so powerful and had an impact on this hitherto hidden issue.

With the high profile international response to the film's release, there was clearly a case for the broadcasters to answer. After viewing the film, Channel Four declined to broadcast *Injustice*, stating:

The film would be impossible to transmit without the risk of protracted and sustained legal action by the Police Federation on behalf for the officers featured in the film.⁵⁰

The police claimed that the film was libellous and also an incitement to riot. In response, we threatened them with legal action for loss of earnings if they did not desist threatening cinemas. It was clear that, were they to pursue their action, we were

⁵⁰ Dale, Peter. Letter to the filmmakers from Peter Dale Head of Documentaries at Channel 4, 24 October 2001

prepared to enter the legal arena, while the police officers' lack of appearance in court lies at the heart of the film. Despite their earlier claims, we never heard from them again. If the state had made such efforts to avoid trials, it was clearly not going to be led into court by us either.⁵¹

The Police Federation was noticeably surprised by the upsurge of support that the film inspired and the fact that institutions ranging from the Sheffield Documentary Festival, the BFI and even the British Council were screening the film widely. Several features appeared in the press outlining the film's content and the attempt to suppress it:

Glen Smyth, chairman of the Metropolitan Police Federation said they hoped the makers of the film would now edit out some of the more controversial material. He said that at one stage in the film, an interviewee calls for "legal justice or street justice" against some of the officers named as murderers. "That is a violent threat against the safety of the officers and this is a worrying dimension of the film," said Mr. Smyth. "We are quite clear that is something that should not remain in the documentary".⁵²

A strong indication of the film's influence emerged through a confidential memo that Channel 4 sent to its preferred suppliers:

Just to let you know that for this Budget Round, IFV is being asked to come up with some more 'ground up' projects which reflect excluded political/social

⁵¹ Bright, Martin (2001)

⁵² Smyth, Glenn (2001)

voices, and where the subjects have some say in the making of the programmes. We probably couldn't show Injustice for legal reasons, but that's the kind of territory; so would a film about Genoa made by the protesters have been. Please let us know if you see anything like this coming across your desk.⁵³

It is only due to the decency of one of the recipients that we received a copy of this, but it is clear that the notions of a 'documentary of force' are embedded in the call for proposals. Whilst the broadcasters were refusing to screen our work, they did recognise a working method that was organic, collaborative and dealt with excluded voices – all key elements of our approach.

By early 2003, the litigation threats had subsided and the film was being sold to international broadcasters.⁵⁴ Channel 4 nevertheless still refused to show the film and, in order to force the issue beyond the normal structure of letter writing and commissioning meetings, a decision was taken to project the film onto the side of the Channel 4 building. As a spectacle, it had an impact. The headline of the Press Gazette was *C4 'cowards' won't show 'death in custody film'*:

A documentary-maker has accused Channel 4 of "cowardice" for refusing to show a film highlighting deaths of black people in police custody. Fero's accusations of cowardice come as Channel 4 chief executive Mark Thompson

⁵³ Preferred providers email from Adam Barker, Commissioning Edit for Independent Film & Video 22 February 2002.

⁵⁴ John, Cindi (2001)

promised the broadcaster would “do things first, continue to make trouble, inspire change and be Britain’s bravest and most original broadcaster.”⁵⁵

We could now claim that *Injustice* had in fact been screened on Channel 4 but, of course, not in the usual way! Chanan outlines how ‘there remain independent films that television refuse to broadcast and conventional distributors decline’, including *Injustice*, which he describes as ‘closer to Third Cinema’.⁵⁶

Impact

The distribution and impact of *Injustice* lasted for a decade before the next output. This period had been spent distributing the film, with weekly screenings in a range of locations from cinemas to community centres, nationally and internationally, including a screening at the European Parliament.⁵⁷ At each screening, a Q&A was organised with the film participants, with radical results. The film was able to create space for militancy that was latent in the audiences. The notion of the embedded documentarist cannot simply be defined as the research gathering and production/distribution stage, but must be extended to an output with a political

⁵⁵ Azeez, Wale. (2003)

⁵⁶ Chanan, Michael. (2007)

⁵⁷ Editorial on BBC (5 March 2002)

impact. This was very much in the tradition of Third Cinema, and each screening was 'a place only for those who feel identified with the struggle'.⁵⁸

Commenting on a screening of *Injustice* in Los Angeles, the renowned Oscar-nominated filmmaker, David Koff,⁵⁹ commented:

These days films are for mobilising money and awards rather than for mobilising people. The fact that a social movement has been generated by the film is evidence of the power of cinema, I would say - a capacity of film-making that is virtually ignored nowadays. I'm very impressed with what they have done with their film and it seems to be taking off.⁶⁰

Ownership of the material is a shared platform and it was on that basis that the film was seen, discussed, debated and ultimately made a significant political impact. A review of the police investigation system, the resignation of the head of the CPS and the intervention of the Attorney General all followed the release of the film. This instigated a policy review, leading to an increase in the number of prosecutions of police officers, albeit, again, without any convictions.

The controversy of the film also drew extensive attention from academics, and presentations were made on panels, where our methodology was put forward:

⁵⁸ Getino, Octavio and Solanas, Fernando. (1971)

⁵⁹ Koff directed the seminal *Blacks Britannica* (1978) and *Occupied Palestine* (1981).

⁶⁰ Campbell, Duncan. (2002)

There is a need for “citizen journalists” to form collectives, similar to the productions that came from the Arab Spring and earlier collective movements. Citing revolutionary writer Frantz Fanon and Marxist theoretician and politician Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* as invaluable resources towards the formation of “collective memories of resistance” and “mass educational programmes”, Fero put forward an exceptionally provocative and clear argument for the organisation and education of what we now know as the “citizen journalist”: members of the public who record the peaks of action and resistance that are punctuating our current times.⁶¹

Defeat of the Champion (Output 6)

PressTV is a London-based media satellite for the Islamic Republic of Iran. I had visited Tehran on a screening tour with *Injustice*, developing links with women’s groups and leftist academics there. It was important for Migrant Media to position ourselves geopolitically, if only to be able to access an international broadcaster for our outputs. By this stage, access to UK broadcasters had been denied to us both explicitly and implicitly. I wished to continue to explore the notion of documentary as a radical process and wanted to test it on wider issues. At that stage, I had been involved with campaigners in documenting the increase in the targeting of Muslim communities following 9/11 and was commissioned to make *Defeat of the Champion* (2011), a

⁶¹ Zarins, Kelly. (2015)

documentary about the campaign to remove CCTV targeting of a Muslim community in Birmingham. This was a new approach. It was a narrowly-focused campaign in a small area, but the same methods of using film as a political tool to position minority voices more centrally was the intention. The same research methodologies formed the basis of the project but with a larger number of collaborators in gathering research and in production.

NEWSPEAK (Output 7)

A working relationship was established with PressTV as a source of funding and distribution for our outputs. At the same time, it was necessary to develop the notion of a 'documentary of force', exploring how this could function across modes.⁶² PressTV, at that stage, was in conflict with the British Government, and the imprisonment of a BBC journalist in Tehran led to a crisis, one of the sanctions of which was the threat by OFCOM to revoke its broadcast licence. We were commissioned to make a documentary for PressTV about the crisis, largely because of our own reputation due to 'Injustice'.

The film adopted a different approach to my previous work. It was global in outlook, combining extensive archives with poetic imagery, and essayistic in form. The writing

⁶² Nichols, Bill. (2001)

for the film adopted an entirely reflexive mode. Combining imagery with an auteur's voiceover as a poetic stream of consciousness, it followed Kluge's proposal that:

The cinematic movement has great similarities to the brain's stream of thoughts and images; the main thing is to entrust oneself to this stream.⁶³

The film's content was politically confrontational. *Newspeak* was broadcast by PressTV on Sky on the 20th January 2012. This was the last film broadcast by the channel. It had been commissioned as a response to the impending act of censorship, and held back for that moment. Shortly after the broadcast, at 3.00pm, OFCOM revoked PressTV's licence to broadcast in the UK and the channel was taken off air.

Who Polices the Police? (Output 8)

With outputs now increasing, and larger international audiences, I took the decision to revisit the research that we had undertaken for *Injustice*. The notion of the embedded documentarist is not transitory, and we had maintained our original method of continuing to document cases through filming, archiving the history of resistance to custodial deaths as well as supporting family campaigns. With *Who Polices the Police?* (2014), a film about the death of Sean Rigg at Brixton Police Station, the research explored and questioned, again, why there had still not been any successful state prosecutions. Our expertise on the issue enabled us to widen our

⁶³ Kluge, Alexander. (1964)

research to include testimonies from key figures in the IPCC. This new development, using a conventional expository approach of positioning conflicting arguments, required a counterpoint, so the narrative was delivered as poetry. Once again, to maximise the impact, the film's release was timed to coincide with the end of an inquest into the death, which, as Andrews and Parker state:

Saw the re-opening of the IPCC investigation of the death of Sean Rigg. Recounted in Ken Fero's moving film, *Who Polices the Police?*, the death of Sean Rigg in 2008 remains in a controversial and deeply sinister sequence of events.⁶⁴

Exploring the notion of a documentary of force, this film marked an expansion of the experimentation with image, sound and text. "The coincidence of linguistic, acoustic, and visual forms and their integration into the montage enables films to make more complex statements than would be possible with one of these forms alone."⁶⁵ The inclusion of captions and block text, that Godard uses to draw attention to the image, was employed to comment on and complicate the flow of the images.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Andrews, Kehinde and Palmer, Lisa Amanda. (2016)

⁶⁵ Kluge, Alexander and Reitz, Edgar (1965)

⁶⁶ See for example Dronsfield, Jonathan Lahey. (2010)

Po Po (Output 9)

Moving on to *Po Po*, I began to explore the use of an essayist direction, with the filmmaker directly involved in the narrative. *Po Po* was influenced by the work of Marker.⁶⁷ The film posited the notion of the filmmaker's search for light and the participants' search for justice. The approach was to employ a more eclectic mix of visuals, including activist verite and testimonies, but this time combined with a range of imagery that reflected the gaze of the filmmaker and existed outside the observational and expository modes. Abattoirs, landscapes and cityscapes interplayed with the documentation of the struggle of the family of Jason McPherson, who died in shocking circumstances after being taken to Notting Hill Police Station. The metaphor of the film is the correlation between the search for the truth by Jason's sister that runs parallel with the filmmaker's investigation of light but at the same time act as 'disjunction'. As Pantenburg commented:

The excursiveness and range of association, the breaking off and restarting, with which one is continually confronted in Godard's films, is also characteristic of his texts. Gilles Deleuze has described this as Godard's "creative stammering," in which he sees an effective method of avoiding the precepts and restrictions of a logocentric discourse organized from the top down.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Brancaleone, David. (2012)

⁶⁸ Pantenburg, Volker. (2015)

Burn (Output 10)

The death of Mark Duggan, who was shot by police, was an opportunity to revisit the issue of custody deaths but this time from the notion of the collective memory of three decades of police-related deaths in Tottenham. Four people in a small community, all black and working class, had died at the hands of the police and this film retraced their story, delivered in the form of a poetic essay. Guzman wrote:

I've always thought that the domain of the authored documentary lies somewhere between the documentary and the essay. That's been my definition for most of my life. We take something from journalism and something from the essay. But our work isn't scientific, it's a form of artistic work, so it's subjective, a matter of ideas, intuitions, comparisons and the juxtaposition of interesting things.⁶⁹

The filmic approach to this project again explored the notion of the essay form and combined prose with verite testimonies. Richter states that, with the essay film, "one is at liberty to jump through space and time: from objective representation to fantastical allegory".⁷⁰ *Burn* was an experiment in form and structure that is being taken forward in my current output, *Ultraviolet*, a feature documentary on the notion of fetishist disavowal⁷¹ of state violence in the UK. The interest in the essay

⁶⁹ Drake, Christopher. (2015)

⁷⁰ Richter, Hans. (1940)

⁷¹ Zizek, Slavoj. (2009)

film, which can be seen as the auteur film of the documentary, is based on the increasing need to be reflective regarding the images gathered over the last decade.

Christina Scherer outlines the tradition of the genre as follows:

The essay film should be seen in this auteur tradition: the film essayist counters the conventions of form and content with a variety of expressive possibilities and individual experiences. These are the organizing and inspirational principle of his creative process.⁷²

Current Practice

A mini retrospective of my work at the National Film Theatre⁷³ provided an opportunity to begin to critique the work within today's media landscape and continue moving in the direction of poetic testimonies.

An archive of material has been collected from 2005 onwards that forms the core of *Ultraviolet* and allows the expansion of how a 'documentary of force' can traverse various documentary modes - expository, reflective and poetic. Is a fusion of interviews and poetic essays valid when dealing with issues around justice based on the establishment of truth? The notion of truth of the documentary image has always

⁷² Scherer, Christina (2001)

⁷³ Athwal, Harmit (2014)

been challenged. Godard famously fell out with the American cinema-verite filmmakers Leacock and Pennebaker, 'whose own attachment to the simple truth of the documentary image was in direct contradiction with Godard's own investigations'.⁷⁴

Citing the risks of continuing to make films like *Injustice* in terms of distribution, Korte and Sternberg write:

Film-makers have decided to continue the tradition of anti-mainstream and/or oppositional film-making, enabling them to address misrepresentation or uncover persisting racism, if at the cost of specialised broadcast slots (as in the case of film directed by John Akomfrah) or at the risk of not being shown at all (see Channel 4's refusal to broadcast *Injustice*) such films are likely to be pushed even further into the domain of festival and arthouse film.⁷⁵

There have also been some recent experiments in animated documentaries. In *The Eyes of Aliyah* (2017) and *Aydan and the Spiders* (2017), for example, I sought to attempt to depict testimonies in an visually expressive way using animation. Merali describes the project as follows:

In addition to garnering statistics and analyses of events and their impact on the securitisation discourse, they have produced films with renowned director

⁷⁴ MacCabe, Colin. (1980)

⁷⁵ Korte, Barbara and Sternberg, Claudia. (2003)

Ken Fero highlighting individual cases of injustice where the narrator and subject of the films' lives have been devastated by unproven allegations and or refusing to co-operate with the intelligence agencies.⁷⁶

A documentary of force takes a trajectory where state agents are directly confronted, where impact is political to the extent that it exposes the government institution and individuals involved but, crucially, where the power of the voice is one of *demand* rather than *appeal*. The shift that will lead to a reckoning of custodial deaths is a historical inevitability. The films submitted have played a role in pushing this forward and continue to do so. Whilst the outputs from *Injustice* onwards continue to suffer from the refusal by UK television to broadcast them, the ability to distribute the films across the internet has given the films an active, continuing role in the debate.

The outputs presented here are *interventions* and less an alternative view than an attempt to relocate the margins at the centre. How does image-making feed into this? There are few images of resistance shown on mainstream television. The notion to be undertaken is an approach that requires the abandonment of logical thinking to which theory is even terminologically bound. Within film, **Logos Imago** (picture logic) together with Vertovian *montage* form the initial attempt to free the image from the word. Today, the concept of *image as language*, when it comes to the screen, is an area of praxis that requires far more investigation.

⁷⁶ Merali, Arzu (2018)

Deleuze, in discussing the work of the painter Francis Bacon, writes about “the violence of sensation (and not representation), a static or potential violence, a violence of reaction and expression”.⁷⁷ The subject of the films is the result of violence, depicted through the retelling, reconstruction and images of the deaths but also about the violence of language and the violence of inertia.

Looking forward, the project is to make impactful work using strategies of confrontation developed over the previous outputs. The work initiated in *Popo* and *Burn*, that continues in *Ultraviolent* (currently in post-production), are films that “aim for something more than the cinematographic and contribute to a general image critique”⁷⁸ by combining a political analysis of the image with the emotional content of testimonial interviews. It is an increasingly reflexive approach and aims to explore the issue of state violence, as well as resistance, as a battleground of images as much as of documenting struggles for justice. Violence by the state is both national and international and those connections need to be made in order to overcome the distance between the viewer and the action. Like every film in the portfolio, it is a call to arms for the dislocated to unite in collective action.

⁷⁷ Deleuze, Gilles. (2003)

⁷⁸ Pantenburg, Volker. (2015)

In summary, the work in the portfolio combines an embedded documentarist practice with visual poetic experimentation and a confrontational activist approach. Within the context of a 'documentary of force', this is the body of knowledge and practice that is presented as a sustained contribution to film culture.

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Documentary Practice as Radical Process in Challenging Dominant Media and State Narratives

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1.	BRITAIN'S BLACK LEGACY (45mins/1991/UK France/ FR3 Television) Documentary 50% Co-directed with Mogniss Abdallah	https://vimeo.com/213065866
2.	AFTER THE STORM (30 mins/1992/ Migrant Media) Documentary Film broadcast by BBC Television	https://vimeo.com/37626555
3.	TASTING FREEDOM (50 minutes/1994) Documentary Film broadcast by Channel 4 TV	https://vimeo.com/34956247
4.	JUSTICE DENIED (50 minutes/1995/Migrant Media) Documentary Film broadcast by Channel 4 TV	https://vimeo.com/70408219
5.	INJUSTICE (98 minutes/Migrant Media/2001) Documentary Film. Distributed by BFI.	https://vimeo.com/34633260
6.	DEFEAT OF THE CHAMPION (25minutes/PressTV/2011) Documentary Film broadcast by PressTV	https://vimeo.com/35962437
7.	NEWSPEAK (25minutes/PressTV/2011) Documentary Film broadcast by PressTV	https://vimeo.com/34527445
8.	WHO POLICES THE POLICE (52 mins/UK/Migrant Media/2012) Documentary Film broadcast by PressTV	https://vimeo.com/46132509
9.	PO PO (25minutes/UK/2013/Migrant Media) Documentary Film broadcast by PressTV	https://vimeo.com/73925091
10.	BURN (30 minutes/UK/Migrant Media/2014) Documentary Film broadcast by PressTV	https://vimeo.com/103783794