

**LEEDS
ARTS RESEARCH
CENTRE**

SHOK

PHILIP ROBERTSON

OUTPUT INFORMATION

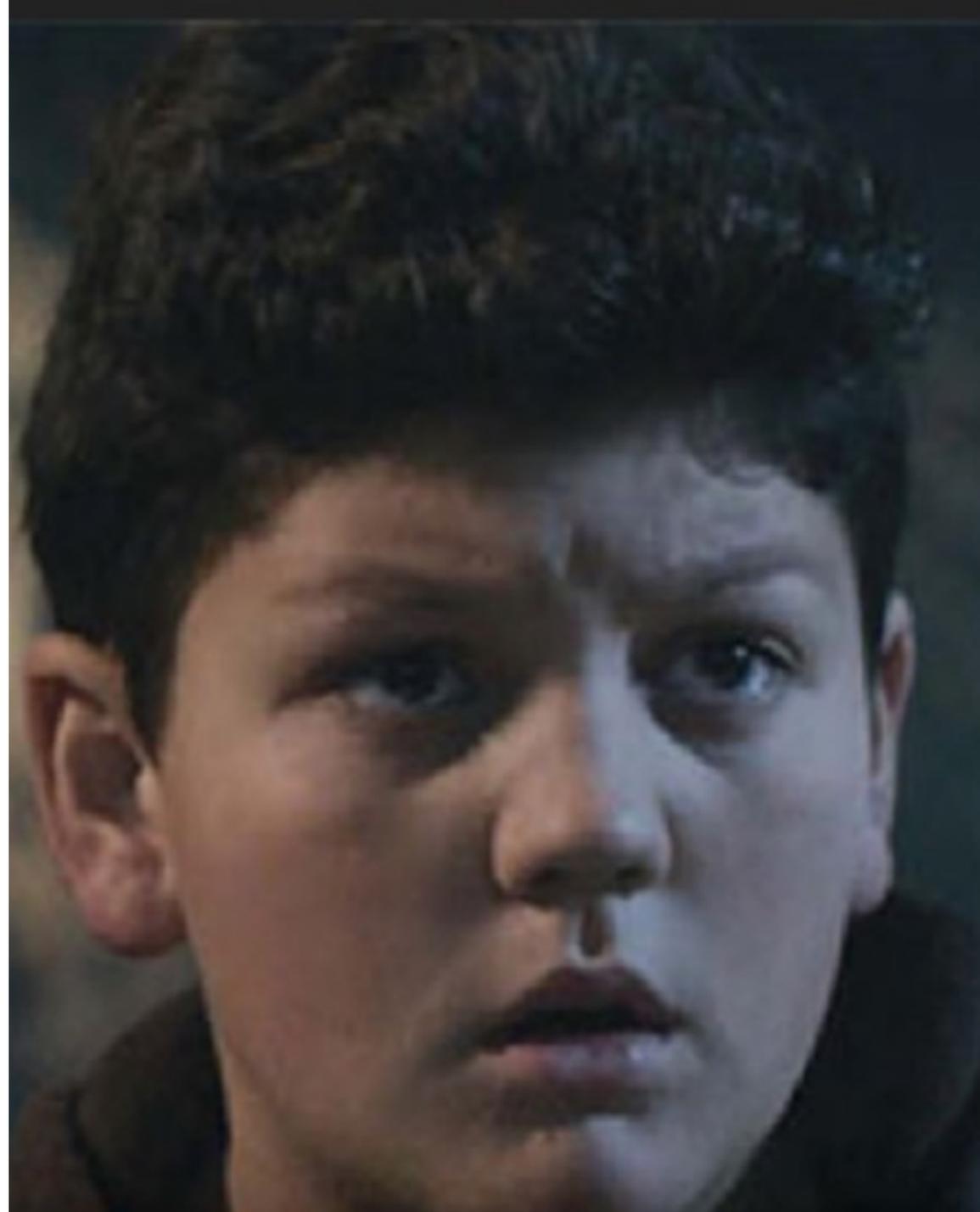
Title:
Shok

Output Type:
Q – Digital or visual media

Year:
2016

Output allocation:
Filmmaking practice research

URL:
<https://www.fandor.com/films/shok>



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

Robertson's cinematography for the short film *Shok* (Albanian for 'friend') explores how the social, political and historical reality of the Kosovan war could be communicated through image-making.

Robertson's methodology for identifying a visual cinematographic language for *Shok* was grounded in an "analytic auto-ethnographical practice based enquiry" (McIntyre, 2018). The first phase of this process included an extensive survey of texts on the history and aftermath of the conflict in Kosovo; and the abundant audiovisual records of the time. Robertson gathered new primary sources in the form of interviews with survivors of the Kosovan war and genocide during research fieldtrips, also visiting the Adem Jashari Memorial for further testimonies describing the experiences of the Jashari family. This led into the second phase where the visual structure for *Shok* was mapped against fine art sources such as the Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1490-1510), which provided a visual metaphor for what Serbia brought to Kosovo.

Subsequently, Robertson's cinematographic visual language for *Shok* manifested the character's internal emotions through external landscapes and the colour palette: "The muted cinematography is beautiful, reflecting Kath's innermost torment" (Nikki Baughan, *Empire*); demonstrating the power of pathetic-fallacy in cinematography to relay human experience.

Variety's film critic, Dennis Harvey, described *Shok* as "a visually arresting film... this intriguing feature's major selling point by far is Philip Robertson's widescreen lensing of rural Russia". *Shok* has been shown in over 35 selected Film Festivals internationally, receiving an Academy Award nomination for Best Live Action Short Film (2016), in addition to 22 further international film festival awards. In 2016 the Kosovar President, Atifete Jahjaga, and the British Ambassador in Kosovo paid tribute to the cinematography of *Shok* in "[bringing] our story through film to a global audience." Project funding: €15,000 from the Kosovo Centre for Cinematography.

BASED ON TRUE EVENTS
KOSOVO 1998

SHOK

OSCAR® NOMINATED
BEST LIVE ACTION SHORT FILM

"REMINISCENT OF THE GOLDEN
AGE OF FILM-MAKING"

THE EXAMINER

"SUPERB PERFORMANCES"

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

"THE FILM TO BEAT"

THE WASHINGTON POST

SHOK is now playing in theaters across the nation as part of THE OSCAR® NOMINATED LIVE ACTION SHORTS series. Check your local listings or go to www.shortcuts.tv/theoscarshorts for more info.

AMPAS® MEMBERS AND A GUEST IN LOS ANGELES, NEW YORK AND SAN FRANCISCO ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE FOLLOWING SPECIAL SCREENINGS :

MUSEUM OF TOLERANCE

07:30 PM | 02.15.2016
9786 W. PICO BLVD. LA. CA 90035

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

08:00 PM | 02.17.2016 | 11 WEST 53RD ST, NEW YORK
IN CELEBRATION OF KOSOVO INDEPENDENCE DAY

LANDMARK EMBARCADERO

07:30 PM | 02.18.2016
1 EMBARCADERO, SF, CA

MALIBU JEWISH CENTRE

06:00 PM | 02.21.2016
24855 PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY,
MALIBU, CA 90265

To RSVP and more info: shok@tcdm-associates.com View SHOK trailer at : www.shokshortfilm.com

PLOT SUMMARY

Based on true events (Kosovo 1998), "Shok" is set during the escalation of the Kosovo War when the country was occupied by Serbia...two young Kosovan boys, Petrit and Oki, are the best of friends. After Oki buys a bike, Petrit is desperate to have one of his own. Ever the businessman, Petrit finds a niche dealing cigarette papers to the occupying Serbian troops. However, with tensions and violence escalating in the country, many would see this as traitorous. Building a steady network of contacts, Petrit drags Oki into ever more dangerous situations until their lives are put at risk. As their relationship is tested to the limits, they begin to encounter the true intentions of the Serbians and learn the meaning of friendship.

ROBERTSON'S CINEMATOGRAPHIC HISTORY

Philip Robertson is an internationally renowned cinematographer who also serves as the Senior Lecturer in Cinematography at the Northern Film School in Leeds Beckett University. Robertson trained at the Russian State Institute of Cinematography in Moscow (VIGK) and is a graduate of the Northern Film School.

Robertson has an impressive international body of work ranging from feature films, TV dramas, commercials and documentaries.

The drama strand of his film and television career embraces most genres and budgets – from gritty Northern comedy such as *Ideal* (2006) (Jonny Vegas – Best Comedy, Royal Television Society) to lush costume dramas such as *Larkrise to Candleford* (2008) to BAFTA winning single dramas such as *Zig Zag Love* (2009) (director Gillies McKinnon BAFTA, *Small Faces*) to mainstream Hollywood productions.

Robertson has won numerous national and international Awards for his work, which include two prestigious Kodak Vision awards for cinematography; one for his first feature film *Beyond the Ocean* (2000), the other for the critically acclaimed *Frozen* (2005) (Shirley Henderson BAFTA).

Some of Robertson's other feature film highlights include *You And I* (2011) (director Roland Joffé -*The Killing Fields*, 1984 and *The Mission* -1986 Oscar nomination for Best Director) to *Rokland* (2012) (Martin Thorsson, *Variety's* '10 directors to watch') which was nominated for four Eddas (Icelandic Oscars), one for best Cinematography.

His ongoing approach to researching his aesthetics in visual storytelling has gained Robertson (and the films that he served as a cinematographer) numerous awards and reviews. [Philip Robertson press/awards](#)

[Philip Robertson research profile](#)

[Philip Robertson IMDb profile](#)

[philiprobertsondop website](#)

PHILIP ROBERTSON'S CONTRIBUTION TO SHOK

Robertson's film history is 'a series of original creative works which make a significant contribution to knowledge' and this contribution is demonstrated by means of practice, working methods, originality, mastery, impact and professional reputation in cinematography. awards and nominations testify to the world class quality and impact of his practice ("Shok" was nominated for an Oscar). Additionally, filmmaking as research (n.d., p. 1) notes "festival selection [prizes and reviews are] is often referred to as a proxy for academic peer review". A selection of his work can be seen at <http://philiprobertsondop.com/> and a selection of film festival/prizes and reviews at <https://www.philiprobertsondop.com/press-awards.html>.

“

“It's a visually striking film”

The Observer - Philip French

GG

“A visually arresting film captured in luminous black and white...this intriguing feature's major selling point by far is Philip Robertson's widescreen lensing of rural Russia”

Variety - Dennis Harvey

GG

“Pinpointing the mood... it is a beautifully stark film. Recommended”

BBC Review - Alex Crawford

“

“It's a thoughtful,
beautiful film”

The Guardian - Gareth Mclean

“

“A strikingly
beautiful
feature”

The Times

GG

“The most enthralling and intelligent British feature since Lynne Ramsey's *Ratcatcher*. Achingly beautiful”

Channel 4 Reviews - Anton Bitel

GG

“The black and white scenes of provincial Russia could be mistaken for Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's* childhood”

New York Times - Scott Tobias

“

“Strikingly beautiful
imagery”

Screen international - Geoffrey Macnab

“

“Laden with
promise and
thick with
atmosphere”

Sight and Sound - Sam Wigley

GG

“Making the most photographically of the grim flats and decaying industry of this northwest corner... DVD of the week”

Time Out

GG

“The muted cinematography is beautiful, reflecting Kath's innermost torment”

Empire - Nikki Baughan

BACKGROUND RESEARCH - THE STORY WORLD

Practice (practitioner) - based research and interpretation allowed a cinematographic aesthetic unity to be constructed by Robertson's immersion in the story world of "Shok". As Young and Petzold, (1972, p. 23 quoted in Cowan 2016, p. 68) state, "The cameraman stands at the natural confluence of the two main streams of activity in the production of a film - where the imagination [and research] meets the reality of the film process". Pedagogical research led to the creation of a deeper understanding of the conflict and the impact this had on the lives and sense of identity of the Kosovan people. These processes led Robertson to construct a vision and to create a unity for the aesthetics of this film.

Key texts to the understanding of the social, political, historical and the outcome of events in the former Yugoslavia were: (Jonassohn & Björnson, 1998) (Rohde, 1997), (Adam, 2011, pp. 317-339) (Leitenberg, 2006, p. 22-24). Robertson also made use of the abundant audiovisual records of the time to reinforce the scale of these human atrocities - laying a firm foundation for the background to the film "Shok".

YUGOSLAVIA – KEY RESEARCH TEXTS

The U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Article II signed in 1948 says “genocide involves an intent to destroy - in whole or in part - a national, ethnic, racial or religious group” (United Nations Office of Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (n.d)). In the former Yugoslavia “ethnic cleansing” was systematically carried out by the Serbs on ethnic Albanians . Katz (1994, p.131, quoted in Jonassohn Björnson, 1998, p.132) states that:

I shall employ the notion of Genocide as applied to, and only applied to the actualization of the intent, however successfully carried out, to murder *in whole or in substantial part* any national, ethnic, racial, religious, political, social, gender or economic group, as these groups are defined by the perpetrator, by whatever means.

The number of war-related dead in the former Yugoslavia which includes Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 1990-1999 was estimated at 300,000 and the estimated civilian deaths in Kosovo was 10,000 (Leitenberg, 2006, p.79)

Danner (1999 quoted in Adams , 2011, p.323) describes the Serbs operational methods as follows :

1. Concentration. Surround the area to be cleansed and after warning the resident Serbs ... intimidate the target population with artillery fire and arbitrary executions and then bring them out into the streets.
2. Decapitation. Execute political leaders and those capable of taking their places: lawyers, judges, public officials, writers, professors.
3. Separation. Divide women, children, and old men from men of "fighting age" -- sixteen years to sixty years old.
4. Evacuation. Transport women, children, and old men to the border, expelling them into a neighbouring territory or country.
5. Liquidation. Execute "fighting age" men, dispose of bodies.

KOSOVO (1998-2000) - KEY RESEARCH TEXT

Adams (2000, section I) describes the above Serbian operating method in Kosovo as follows:

This prescription for expelling the target population and liquidating "battle-age" men wherever possible seems to have been followed to the letter in Kosovo. It would be surprising if it had not been, given the unquestionable scale of the Serbs' genocidal assault, which uprooted 800,000 civilians and sent them flooding into surrounding territories.

The United Nations high Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR (1999, p.11) state that "A total of 848,100 ethnic Albanians fled or were expelled, [from Kosovo] including 444,600 to Albania, 244,500 to Macedonia and 69,900 to Montenegro.

Domanovic (2014) in his journal article reports that the Kosovo Memory Book documents 13,517 people who were killed or went missing between January 1998 and December 31, 2000 - the timescale for the story depicted in "Shok".

ETHNOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

Robertson travelled to Kosovo for two weeks of scouting a month before filming began and had the opportunity to speak/ interview to a cross-section of the population who had lived through this time in Kosovo, or had family and friends who had. Bornat (2012, p.1) notes “Oral history, with its combination of methods drawn from history and sociology, places emphasis on the significance of temporal context and memory by interviewing people about their past experience.”

In addition to hearing the testaments of many Kosovans about their experiences and recollections of living through these times and having time to digest the life changing enormity these experiences had on the people as well as location scouting. Robertson decided to take time out of his very busy schedule to travel to the Adem Jashari Memorial to bear witness to and hear accounts of what happened in the village of Prekaz to the Jashari family - [memorial to KLA](#). This is another example of his Qualitative Research which was performed in situ. As Eastmond . Eastmond (2007, p.248) states:

Narratives are not transparent renditions of ‘truth’ but reflect a dynamic interplay between life, experience and story. Placed in their wider socio-political and cultural contexts, stories can provide insights into how forced migrants seek to make sense of displacement and violence, re-establish identity in ruptured life courses and communities, or bear witness to violence and repression.

but cautions “the researcher must pay particular attention to his/her own role in the production of narrative data and the representation of lived experience” (Eastmond, *ibid*)

The open ended questions and answers, Robertson received from the Kosovan people who had lived through this time exhibited three major recurring themes – that of never being able or willing to forget - a need for the world to recognise what happened in Kosovo at this time (Hence Shok has made such an important impact to the Kosovan people “bringing our story through film, to a global audience” – (see Presidents Atifete Jahjaga statement in impact section), but he was struck by the humanity of the people their willingness to try to move on and help build this new country.

This is summed up wonderfully by the Director Jamie Donoughue and Producer Eshref Durmish - who’s true story “Shok” is based on, as Jamie says:

Many people are unaware of what happened in the region and lessons of past (and Indeed present) conflicts have not been learnt. I wanted to tell a story of ordinary people, who are the true victims of war, as well as explore how a nation can positively rebuild and move forward. (Popova, 2016)

UNDERPINNING CINEMATOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Robertson's practice-as-research has a sustained focus on the relationship between how he as the author for the aesthetics of the film can convey emotions in both internal and external "landscapes". Ruskin (1901) defines as Pathetic Fallacy: "to signify any description of inanimate natural objects that ascribes to them human capabilities, sensations and emotions". As one critic said of Robertson's work - "captured with a real eye for beauty, each frame looks like a work of art, using the coastline as another character in the story"- **Shadow on the Wall - Rich Cline** <http://www.shadowsonthewall.co.uk/04/art-p.htm>. Pathetic fallacy is an important aspect of Robertson's work on "Shok" as the war was equally about the land and the people's relationship to the land.

Arnheim, (1996, p. v) states :“Artistic inspiration, perceiving and thinking are indivisibly intertwined”. Robertson's work shows coherency of process and research methodology in his contribution to his films. He does this by the immersion of himself in the story's culture, society, and other tangible and intangible influences of the people, lands and environments where his films are set. "reality [depicted by creating the image] has always been interpreted through the reports given by the image" (Sontag, 1997, p.153). Robertson's representation of this *reality* provides a way of depicting a particular truth or themes in the concepts being explored (Arnheim, 1996), (Feyerabend, 1991).

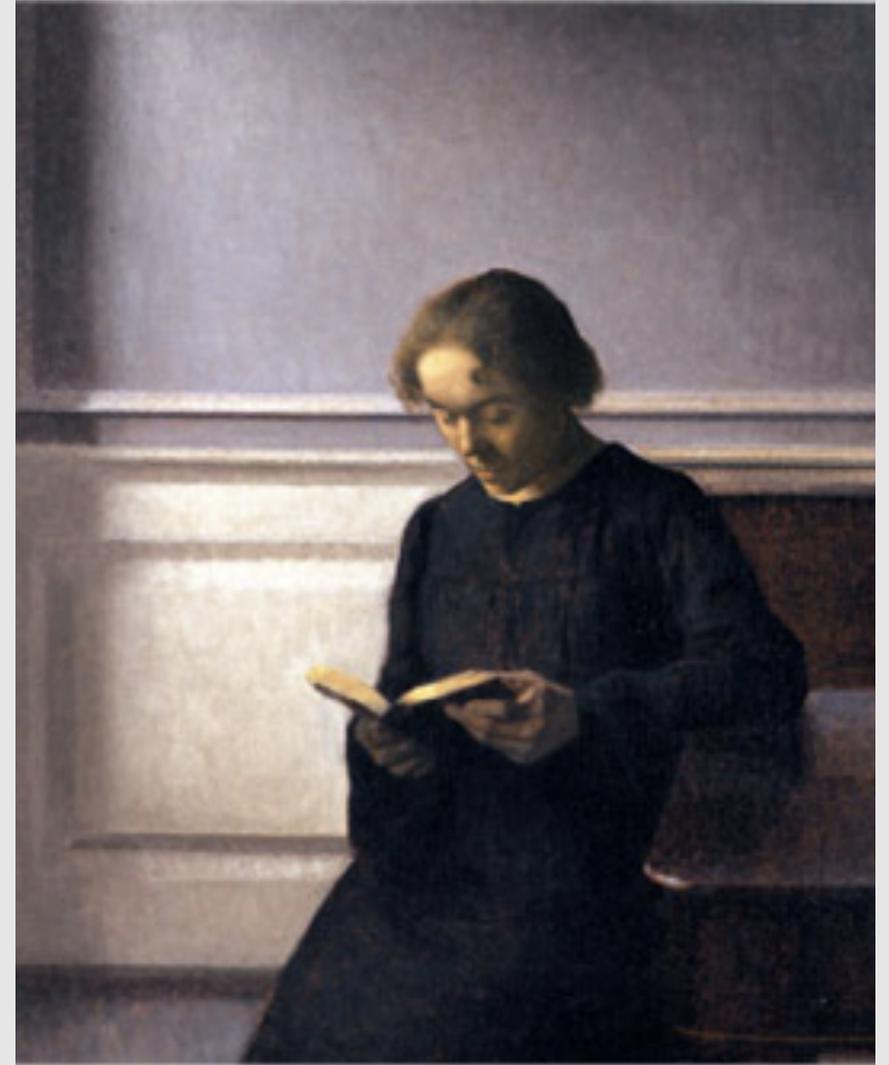
Robertson draws on a variety of influences – images aren't just representational, they also represent the psychological and emotional view of how you choose to tell a story. Not only for the characters but for the audience, (Arnheim, 1996), (Kracauer, 1997, pp.27-58, 60-73, 157-192). As one critic's review of Robertson's work stated, "The muted cinematography is beautiful, reflecting Kath's innermost torment." Thus Robertson interprets the lead character's internal landscape with his images, as well as contribution to the strong sense of place and time as Anton Bitel, Channel 4 reviews states, 'Frozen is serious, mannered, rich in theme, achingly beautiful, with nuanced performances and a strong sense of place.' <https://www.querilla-films.com/title.php?FilmID=29>

As Picasso put it "The artist is the receptacle of emotion that comes from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from the scrap of paper, from the passing shape, from the spider's web" (Walther 2000, p.18). This is his ongoing research dialogue. He has followed this approach in his past work and will continue to develop what he sees as "a lifelong investigation into the aesthetics of visual storytelling". This research dialogue is clearly reflected in the Cinematography of "Shok". As a review of "Shok" states "Shok is a beautiful a film, that lingers in your mind much longer than its brief running time." **GQ Magazine** <http://www.gq.com/story/oscars-2016-live-action-short-films>

KEY VISUAL REFERENCES



Come and See (1985)



Hammershoi (1864-1916)



Eternal Sunshine Of A Spotless Mind (2004)



The Garden of Earthly Delights (1490-1510)

IMPACT

In the early hours of the morning, together with British Ambassador and many young people of Kosovo, we watched the Oscar awards ceremony. The team of dedicated and talented filmmakers brought our story through film, to a global audience. For the first time in our Country's life we became a part of this event with global repercussions. We needed to share our story with others. One of particular value and resonance with our people, a dream realised. We've witnessed once again that when we get the chance, we have much to offer. This is a tremendous success for Kosovo cinematography and artists. Congratulations for the achievements of our current and future community and allowing me to being a witness to your excitement. I know that it's not far from the day we will bring an Oscar to Kosovo. "Friend" is our winner.

(Translated from Albanian)

Kosovar President Atifete Jahjaga (29th Feb 2016)

<https://www.facebook.com/atifete.jahjaga.zprk/photos/a.316398271782656/963460443743099/?type=3&theater>

"Shok " has achieved a wide-ranging and significant impact, informing public debate, bringing this 'snapshot' of the atrocities perpetrated on ethnic Albanians to a worldwide audience. Transforming the lives of those depicted in and working on the film, bolstering cultural heritage in Kosovo and worldwide. Generating sustainable employment and the acquisition of new skills and methodology in their film industry, influencing fellow filmmakers and making a significant contribution to cultural life.

In Robertson's workshop-based teaching "Shok" is used as a case study to disseminate his work and to explore his poiesis {making}, phronesis {practical wisdom}, praxis {reflection on [and in] action}, (Schön, 1983) techne {craft} and episteme {knowledge} (Greenhalgh, 2018, p.143) as a Cinematographer and working methods to students. This forms a concrete 'real world' example which explores his cultural and creative research, impact, together with the technical and professional dimensions of Robertson's practice.

GG

“Thanks for the amazing achievement of creating a film like ‘Shok’ that gave the world the sense of life in Kosovo in 1998.”

British Ambassador Kosovo Ruairi O’Connell
(Popova, 2016)

“This is the biggest achievement of Kosovo cinema so far and ‘Shok’ has already opened the doors for Kosovo movies to be present at the greatest movie events. The Oscar nomination was a great step forward for the country’s movie industry”

Arben Zharku, Director of Kosovo’s Cinematographic Centre.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2016/01/14/kosovo-movie-reaches-hollywood-01-14-2016/>

GG

“Hope lives when people
remember.”

Simon Wiesenthal

Showed at Museum of Tolerance (special screening 17th Feb 2016)

Simon Wiesenthal - Museum of Tolerance (special screening)

DISSEMINATION

Shown at the Museum of Tolerance L.A. , Museum of Modern Art in New York

International Awards/significant Festival entry. The film subsequently featured in over 25 specially selected Film Festivals internationally. Within the UK and the US as of the 30th March 2016 it had the 5th highest sales on iTunes U.K and 25th in America. Film Festival Screenings include: Newport Beach Film Festival, USA (April 2016); Seefest Film Festival, USA (April 2016); Prishtina Film Festival, Kosovo (April 2016); Human Rights Film Festival, Australia (May 2016); Tribeca Film Festival, USA (April 2016); Kyiv Short Film Festival, Ukraine (April 2016); Short Shorts Film Festival, Japan (June 2016).

At the Pristina Film Festival *Shok* (2016) was awarded an Honorary Golden Goddess for special achievement to Kosovo, only the second time this award has been given. It also was awarded the Annual Prize for Cinematography in 2016 by the Kosovo Ministry of Culture.

SELECTED EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS

<http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/news/0916-leeds-beckett-lecturer-hosts-free-showing-of-oscar-nominated-film/>

<http://www.museumoftolerance.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=tmL6KfNVLtH&b=6771093&ct=14820631>

https://www.masslive.com/news/worcester/index.ssf/2016/02/tv_movie_star_eliza_dushku_to.html

<http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/news/0216-northern-film-school-lecturer-is-cinematographer-on-oscar-nominated-film/>

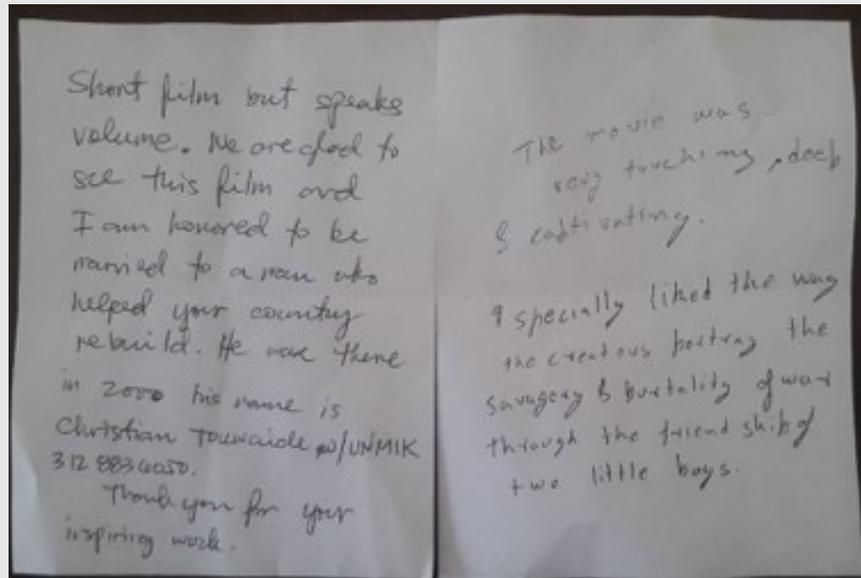
[IMAGO the International Federation of Cinematographers, conference on teaching and researching Cinematography - Brussels - Title of Presentation: The making of the film "Shok" – my research and methods of disseminating the work to students.](#)



Shok (2016) team meet Prince Charles.



Shok (2016) at President Atifete Jahjaga's Oscar Farewell Party.



Letter from a member of the audience.



The two Lead actors Lum Veseli and Andi Bajgora performing as narrators at the Concert for the Canonization of Mother Teresa at the Papal Basilica of Saint Paul.

https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=The two Lead actors Lum Veseli and Andi Bajgora performing as narrators at the Canonization of Mother Teresa at the Papal Basilica of Saint Paul.&epa=SEARCH_BOX

REVIEWS

"...pulls no punches providing the boys a chance at redemption while their remorseless enemy sits on the sidelines awaiting a moment to set an example. Shok delivers it with a deafening blow: heroism and martyrdom wrapped within the senseless violence mankind seems destined to continue repeating."

- The Film Stage <https://thefilmstage.com/review-the-2016-oscar-nominated-short-films-live-action/>

"an impressively ambitious film about two young boys caught in the Kosovo war of the 1990's" – **The Guardian** <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/feb/25/oscars-2016-documentary-short-path-to-success>

"But Shok is more than a foreign coming of age story. It cuts through the complex rhetoric of war and tells Kosovo's troubling history in a compelling and accessible way. Told through the eyes of best friends (or shok) -- it is funny as well as tragic. It reminded me so skilfully that hatred and bigotry can spiral out of control anywhere in the world."-

The Chicago times

<http://www.chicagonow.com/talking->

[world/2016/03/shok-didnt-win-an-oscar-it-did-something-even-better/](http://www.world/2016/03/shok-didnt-win-an-oscar-it-did-something-even-better/)

"Though focused on the boys' friendship and the strain it comes under as result of interactions with the soldiers, the film also hints at the psychology that allows a group of people to be seen as less than human, and the temptation to abuse that develops as result of one group having overwhelming power over another. It also bears a timely message about refugees and just what it takes to drive people from homes their ancestors have occupied for generations". – **eyeforfilm**

<http://www.eyeforfilm.co.uk/review/shok-2015-film-review-by-jennie-kermode>

"21-minute story of two Albanian boys living in a town beset by Serbian troops masterfully builds to a violent gut-punch ending that many viewers will not soon forget". - **Washington**

Post https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/movies/oscar-nominated-shorts-come-to-e-street/2016/01/28/9f5799d4-c08e-11e5-9443-7074c3645405_story.html

REVIEWS

"The Kosovo war has not found itself into too many films that Academy voters get to see. What Shok achieved with its telling of the perils of that conflict through the eyes of two young boys is exquisite" - **The MovieMensch** themovie.com

"It is a study of lingering guilt, with the crimes of the past returning to haunt the now-adult Petrit when he comes across a bike, or possibly the same bike, years later. Shok is to be shown at the Tribeca film festival later this month" - **Julian Borger's The Butcher's Trail is published by Other Press (2016)** <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/04/06/karadzic-verdict-balkan-wars-on-film/>

"Arben Zharku, director of Kosovo's Cinematographic Centre, said the Oscar nomination was a great step forward for the country's movie industry".

"This is the biggest achievement of Kosovo cinema so far and 'Shok' has already opened the doors for Kosovo movies to be present at the greatest movie events," said Zharku" – **Baltic Insight magazine** [.http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-movie-reaches-hollywood-0114-2016](http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-movie-reaches-hollywood-0114-2016)

"Shok is a beautiful film that lingers in your mind much longer than its brief running time. If we had to

pick a winner, this would probably be it" -

GQ Magazine <http://www.gq.com/story/oscars-2016-live-action-short-films>

"A truly touching tale that really helps one to better understand the privileges many of us have. Freedom from oppression, freedom from hate, and relative acceptance of religion and nationality is something truly to be treasured as "Shok" shows us through its heart warming and heart-breaking tale of friendship. The cinematography was near flawless and every moment of the film was filled with tension. The boys' friendship is something that almost all can relate to and their connection in such a bleak world is such a wonderful thing to see. Living in a country in which I can say anything I please short of threatening the safety of the public and go unharmed tends to blind us to the issues that many others suffer through every day due to something that is out of their control. I would highly recommend that everyone of every walk of life watch this transformative film." – **JacobOB** from Ohio, U.S.A.

IMDb user review

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Links:

<https://www.fandor.com/films/shok>

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