

Institution: University of Manchester
Unit of Assessment: 35b (Drama)
Title of case study: Networking & Supporting the work of theatre artists in and from international war zones
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>In Place of War (IPoW) is a research project that has had substantial impact on civil society and cultural life worldwide by documenting, analysing and enhancing the work of war zone theatre practitioners. Paradoxically, in a context of globalisation, these artists are professionally and geographically isolated: indeed, it is often assumed that art cannot take place in a war zone, when in fact it remains a vital means of human expression during times of crisis. To overcome this relative invisibility, the project has helped professionals and organisations in several countries by building artist networks, developing resources for creative practice, and offering practitioner training. The project has also provided support for third sector agencies developing projects in this field, with the research enabling more context-sensitive planning of programmes. There has also been impact on public discourse, providing new insights about the role of artistic work in conflict situations and the esteem in which it is held, while contributing to the increased public profile of such work and its potential for global circulation.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The impact is based on internationally-focused research that was centred at Manchester between 2004 and 2013. The key researchers have been: James Thompson (PI), Jenny Hughes (project research assistant 2004-08, UoM lectureship from 2006), Alison Jeffers (project PhD 2004-07, UoM lectureship from 2008), and Co-I Michael Balfour (University of Exeter 2004-07; Griffith University, Australia, 2007-present). The primary aim of the research was to examine the relationship between performance and war through an analysis of contemporary examples of theatre in sites of armed conflict internationally. Concomitantly, there was also a UK-based focus to the project, looking at performances made here by refugees and asylum seekers, and at forms of theatrical protest against wars prosecuted in other parts of the world. The research has occurred in three key phases:</p> <p>1. Mapping (<i>AHRC project funding, 2004-08</i>) The first phase of the project involved a mapping exercise during which project researchers contacted over 300 theatre and arts organisations in war-zones internationally, as well as all major refugee arts projects in the UK. The objective was to construct as comprehensive an understanding as possible of the ways in which theatre and performance has been used in response to conflict situations. This mapping extended, for instance, to responses to the “war on terror” -- a “counterinsurgency” war resulting in distinct forms of performative response. To document our findings, we constructed an associated website and database of theatre practitioners, digitised thousands of items of data for an online archive, organised seminars and conferences and published a range of outputs including the major project monograph, <i>Performance in Place of War</i> (2009) [3.1]. This edition, written by Thompson, Hughes and Balfour, combined critical analysis, contextual research and a mapping of the diverse range of international practices uncovered by the study. A further AHRC grant (<i>Research Leave scheme</i>) allowed Thompson to complete an additional monograph, <i>Performance Affects</i> (2009) [3.2], which drew on this research to make an argument for an ‘affective turn’ in Applied Theatre. Hughes also published a monograph stemming from aspects of the mapping research, <i>Performance in a Time of Terror</i> (2011) [3.3], and Jeffers published a monograph based on her PhD thesis, <i>Refugees, Theatre and Crisis</i> (2011) [3.4]. In 2010, the project won the <i>THE</i> Award for ‘Excellence and Innovation in the Arts’.</p> <p>2. Networking (<i>Leverhulme network grant, 2009-11</i>) Leverhulme network funding allowed the development and expansion the network of scholars and artists established during the initial research phase, and included three major conferences: in Manchester (2009), at the National Theatre, Kosovo (2010), and in Goma, DR Congo (2011). This network enabled interactions between artists never before possible and facilitated regional meetings of artists that helped open new alliances and opportunities for collaboration.</p> <p>3. In Place of War Online (<i>AHRC follow-on grant, 2012-13</i>) During this third project phase, aimed specifically at extending its potential reach and impact, additional AHRC funds have supported the development of a new online platform for artists and creative practitioners in sites of armed conflict,</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

unrest or disaster. The new phase has opened the project to all art forms and provides an online vehicle for the archiving, connecting and sharing of creative responses to war. The platform is a response to the outcomes of the IPOW project, which demanded ways for work to be stored, for expertise to be shared and for artists to learn from, and become linked to, each other.

Key Findings. The direct insights gained from this body of research include: **(i)** a greater understanding of the role of the arts in war and disaster situations – particularly the relation between the space/time of a conflict and related arts outputs; the differences in orientation between reconciliation and justice-based projects; the links between memorialisation and theatre making; and new understandings of the aesthetic challenges faced by artists in these situations; **(ii)** a critique of international donor practices, which has improved artists' understandings of funding contexts and has helped make donor support more sensitive to local contexts; **(iii)** an affirmation of the importance of arts practices to communities in these sites, which has helped to challenge external assumptions about the priorities of people living through war. This in particular has validated the work of artist groups and enabled new networks of practitioners who can confidently argue for their work as central to local and national development concerns.

3. References to the research (AOR – Available on request)

Key outputs - Monographs:

- 3.1 James Thompson, Jenny Hughes and Michael Balfour (2009). *Performance In Place of War*. Calcutta: Seagull Press and Chicago: Chicago University Press. (AOR)
- 3.2 James Thompson (2009). *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (AOR)
- 3.3 Jenny Hughes (2011). *Performance in a Time of Terror: Critical Mimesis and the Age of Uncertainty*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (AOR)
- 3.4 Alison Jeffers (2011). *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: Performing Global Identities*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. (AOR)

Supplementary:

- 3.5 James Thompson (2005). *Digging Up Stories: Applied Theatre, Performance and War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (AOR)
- 3.6 Alison Jeffers (2008). "Dirty Truth: Personal Narrative, Victimhood and Participatory Theatre Work with People Seeking Asylum", *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 13: 2, pp.217-221.
DOI:10.1080/13569780802054919
- 3.7 Jenny Hughes (2011). "Camping on the Streets, Squares and Wastelands of Power: Theatrical Protest and the 'War on Terror' in the UK", in Jenny Spencer (ed.), *Patriotic Dissent: Staging Political Protest since 9/11* (London: Routledge), pp. 174-90. (AOR)

Evidence of quality: all outputs peer-reviewed and published with international publishers. *Performance in Place of War* was described by reviewers as "a pioneering study" (Marvin Carlson, *Comparative Drama*) that "brilliantly situates war-related performance in a complex web which includes [...] politics, ethics, trauma, geography, and intercultural perspectives" (Jan Cohen-Cruz, *NTQ*). *Performance Affects* was described as a "bold, admirable, moving, lucid and persuasive" account (Jen Harvie, *RiDE*). *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis* was described as "original and provocative . . . a call for and significant contribution to an ethical understanding of refugees" (Caoimhe McAvinchey, *NTQ*). Hughes and Jeffers' books jointly won the Theatre and Performance Research Association (TaPRA) Prize for Early Career Researchers in 2012.

4. Details of the impact

Context: Theatre practitioners and artists in war/conflict zones before this project reported a sense of disconnection, a lack of resources and training and demand for documentation of theirs and others' work. Excellent local practices were rarely linked and there was little opportunity for learning from past experiences. The work was often seen as marginal, and international donors made decisions on funding based on minimal understanding of the role of the arts in these settings. In the practice of applied theatre professionally, the field of theatre in war or conflict zones was unexplored.

Pathways to impact: The project from its initiation has worked with artists, theatre practitioners, NGO workers and others living and working in war zones. At all times it is their experience that has been acknowledged for its value, documented/archived and shared throughout the project. To make this possible, we visited conflict zones directly, while also running workshops and seminars in Manchester for invited international artists. All resources of the project were made freely available to all partners. The project's online strategy has pro-actively developed throughout the initiative, at all times responding to the changing demands of the partners. Its primary objective is to enable a sharing of materials and as wide a public discussion of this work as possible.

Reach and Significance:

Cultural impact on international arts organisations. IPOW has documented, archived and facilitated the interconnection of over 350 arts organisations internationally. This has provided a platform for their work and linked these organisations with similar groups internationally. These organisations acknowledge the importance that the project has had in supporting and enhancing their work: the sustainable nature of the research, notes the Creative Director of Community Arts North West, "has allowed time for real interchange, growth, development of understanding and shared terminology, and the ability to grow as a world-wide movement" [5.2]. IPOW has been involved in training theatre workers in participatory theatre techniques, and in supporting evaluations of their work in local contexts. The benefit reported by these organisations is increased international profile, increased domestic profile created by international links, shared learning of different approaches and practices, and sustaining of their work through the international connections that have been created. 40 of the groups and practitioners whose work has been documented attended the various public events organised by IPOW as part of its networking phase. This included 4 events in Manchester: In Place of War Network Meeting 1 (23-24 July 2011); Skype Seminar from Places of War (8th November 2011); *Performance: In Place of War* Book Launch (17 December 2011); Project Closing Event (15 March 2012). There was also one event in London at the Roundhouse (11 February 2012), one in Pristina, Kosovo (June 2010) and one in Goma, DRC (June 2011). Over 800 people attended the Manchester events, 35 the Kosovo event and 30 the Goma event. The Kosovo event, comments the Executive Director of the Centre for Children's Theatre Development, "has had a huge impact on audiences, and has opened up further discussions on the role of theatre in a newborn country. Mr Thompson's research was also crucial when designing and developing the *Voices* project in Kosovo - an interactive theatre project concerning people gone missing during the war. For the first time after the war in Kosovo, Albanian and Serbian actors worked together in developing and presenting forum theatre scenes to both the Albanian and Serbian community" [5.1].

Engaging with and mediating between NGOs. A number of NGOs have had close association with IPOW during the course of its work, in particular Children in Crisis (CiC) and Search for Common Ground. These partners acknowledge how participation in the network and involvement in the artist training led by researchers has helped improve their use of theatre and the arts, and/or encouraged them to make new links to local arts groups. By way of example, CiC have developed a new initiative in DRC that incorporates theatre performances in their education programmes. This is part of a multi-year project supported by Comic Relief and the Baring Foundation and has led to **Thompson** visiting DRC to run training programmes (July 2010, June 2011, January 2013), as well as running workshops for CiC in London (April 2010), for staff from DRC, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Afghanistan. The Director of Programmes at CiC credits these interventions as "making a significant contribution towards the fulfilment of the two core project objectives: (i) improvements in participation, completion and quality of education for at least 14,000 children; and (ii) strengthened community cohesion and promotion of the rights of women and girls. As evidence of this, an 8-10 % increase in children's enrolment has already been recorded in the schools targeted since 2010; and as a direct result of the TIE component, church leaders from the northern axe of the Plateau have put together a decree supporting the abolishment of all forms of early and forced marriage" [5.3]

Enhancing public understanding. As well as these direct beneficiaries, a greater international understanding of the role of the arts in troubled situations has been developed through public access to the website, dissemination of the project publications (latest sales figures for

Impact case study (REF3b)

Performance in Place of War: 554 in US/UK; 461 in India), and presentation of the project through public events and media outlets. In Place of War's new online platform went live in December 2012 and currently has profiles of 550 different organisations and individuals, and stores 191 artefacts relating to their work. As of July 2013, the site had received 4,383 separate visitors, making 8,332 visits, viewing a total of 27,000 pages [5.5]. Between 2008 and 2010, the previous IPOW website received over 6,000 hits from individuals in 30 different countries. These figures demonstrate an expanding public discourse about the arts in situations of armed conflict. Coverage of the project's work in the UK press has also helped to extend public understanding of these issues [5.7; 5.8].

Influencing professional training. During its primary research phase, the IPOW project conducted sustained case study work in Sri Lanka, creating significant educational and professional practitioner impact in this context. A manual was produced from the training workshops run by **Thompson** (2004-08), which was distributed across the NGO sector on the island. Versions were produced in Sinhala, Tamil and English for people working with children, particularly during the post-tsunami relief period, from 2005 onwards. The manual was also made freely downloadable in pdf form from the IPOW website.

Contributing to civil society and cultural life in the UK. IPOW's other sustained case study explored arts initiatives with refugee and asylum-seeking communities across the UK. As part of this research, IPOW helped establish the Greater Manchester Refugee Arts Partnership. This coalition of Manchester organisations raised the funds for and created the Exodus project, which developed and supported arts programmes by refugee communities from 2004-10 [5.9]. During the REF assessment period, this included five Refugee Arts festivals and two theatre festivals. Participant feedback testified to the power of the productions in contributing to public discourse about refugees, and the importance of having a reflective context in which practitioners could gather: "*Brilliant to have this space for discussion. Great to have the contradictions in practice*" (from evaluation report on 2010 Exodus Festival) [5.4]. One particular initiative amongst the many arts programmes supported was the drama group at the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, set up by **Thompson** and run by **Jeffers** from 2004-10 [5.6]. The latter won the University of Manchester "Volunteer of the Year" award for her work on this project, and was also awarded the University's first Medal for Social Responsibility (both 2010). UoM's Martin Harris Centre hosted *Platforma* from 31st October-1st November 2013, a national conference of refugee artists, advocates and activists, co-organised by **Jeffers**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

All claims referenced in section 4.

Letters from networked artists/NGOs:

- 5.1 Letter from the Centre for Children's Theatre Development, Kosovo.
- 5.2 Letter from Community Arts Northwest/Exodus.
- 5.3 Letter from Children in Crisis.

Evaluation report:

- 5.4 "Lives Being Changed": Exodus Onstage 2010

Web links:

- 5.5 Project website: www.inplaceofwar.net
- 5.6 "Clients Thrive in Alternative Drama Group." News piece on website run by Medical Foundation for Care of Victims of Torture: <http://m.freedomfromtorture.org/news-blogs/896>
- 5.7 "How to make a drama out of a crisis." Guardian interview with Thompson. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/apr/14/theatre-prisons-probation-james-thompson>
- 5.8 "Theatre of War": feature article by Thompson for Times Higher Education. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/theatre-of-war/2001453.fullarticle>
- 5.9 Feature page on Exodus project, on website of Community Arts Northwest: <http://can.uk.com/current-artistic-programme/exodus/> (cites Jeffers on main page).