

Title: **Acting Alone: exploring by-stander engagement through performer/audience relationship**

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Abstract (98 words)

Acting Alone: a solo performance that explored how social/political engagement in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict might be created through the performer/audience relationship. Drawing on practice as research and data gathered from an extensive tour, this article examines the complexities of creating human rights theatre for a by-stander or tritagonist audience to create engagement, discourse and agency. *Acting Alone* used verbatim and autobiographical material to create a theatrical immediacy in which the audience, as by-standers, were invited to cross the dramaturgical divide to engage actively in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict exploring the question - can one person make a difference?

About the Author (50 words)

Ava Hunt has worked for 37 years in applied theatre, TV and film. She trained with Boal in Forum, and Heathcote in Mantle of the Expert. She is a Senior Lecturer at University of Derby in Applied Theatre and working internationally: Sri Lanka, Russia, Czech Republic, Palestine, Romania, Australia, India.

Acting Alone was a practice as research solo performance piece, which toured to over a thousand young people and adults throughout the United Kingdom and internationally over a period of eighteen months (2015-2016). Originally commissioned by Amnesty International (Wirksworth Branch Derbyshire) in September 2014, the piece was a response to the renewed violence in Gaza as part of the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian conflict. *Acting Alone* explored the by-stander role asking the question: '**Can one person make a difference?**'

The piece wove together autobiographical and verbatim material, based on what I had experienced in Palestinian refugee camps, together with examples of by-standers using documentary material. By examining stories of by-standers who had crossed the divide and undertaken heroic acts it enabled audiences to inquire into what is the role of the by-stander within a conflict? What are the risks for the by-stander when taking direct action against an oppressive regime? And also, what is the responsibility of the international community to human rights atrocities?

This article is a case study using Practice as Research (PaR) methodology which provided me with both the plurality of performer and researcher using embodied knowledge to extend audiences' understanding beyond objective critical analysis (Jones 2009). Reflecting on my practice as performer/writer/researcher I collected primary data: audience feedback and critical reviews, to inform the continued development of the production and to assess impact against my research question.

The PaR methodology provided me with a process of constant reflection throughout the making and touring process. The script was written over a period of months, devising, rehearsing and refining material with direction and dramaturgy by Tilly Branson. Following the pilot performance for Amnesty International in 2014 an Arts Council England grant subsidised over thirty performances across a wide range of venues - studio theatres, village halls, schools, community centres, political party groups, academic conferences and international theatre festivals. This wide range of venues ensured the performances were accessible to a diverse audience in relation to class, age, ethnicity and including specifically Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

The data collection process did not involve asking audiences to complete questionnaires as we did not want the act of ticking boxes to replace critically reflecting on the conflict and considering what action might be taken. The intent, was, therefore, for audiences to engage in discourse, to be animated and active. The theatre construct offered audiences, as by-standers, an invitation to take action at the end of the show, to cross the dramaturgical divide, creating an ending where no-one, including the performer, would know the resolution.

This opening up of a new relationship between spectators and performance is what Rancière suggests, as the 'aesthetic cut' (2009: 82) providing both pedagogic and active opportunities in order to create insight into, 'new configurations of what can be seen, what can be said and what can be thought and, consequently, a new landscape of the possible' (103). Opening up new possibility around a stagnating and stale-mate conflict could possibly facilitate an international by-stander community to: consider and take responsive/political action.

Audience responses were recorded anecdotally by myself following discussions after the performance, as well as from emails, social media: Facebook, Tweets, LinkedIn and reviews

from theatre critics. The thousand plus audience responded during the performance emotionally (laughter, tears etc), with silence, heckling and applause. Afterwards, audiences engaged in animated discussion with each other and myself as performer. Many expressed gratitude upon hearing the stories, some were inspired to take action. However as might be expected, there were also some strongly held, oppositional beliefs expressed as well.

Acting Alone produced qualitative data from which I was able to analyse, together with applied theatre theory, an exploration of the by-stander or tritagonist role. Within Aristotle's dramatic conflict the roles of the protagonist and antagonist are the primary focus, however, I will argue the third role that of the by-stander or tritagonist, needs to be examined further. How can the tritagonist be empowered to make a difference within a human rights context? This enquiry began for me whilst watching a piece of Playback Theatre in Palestine.

Playback Theatre

I visited Palestine in 2013 to film footage for an adaptation of *The Kites Are Flying*, by Michael Morpurgo (2003), which I would perform to young audiences on my return to the UK. In Bethlehem I spent time at the Alroward Centre and in Jenin with The Freedom Theatre's Playback Company. British director Di Travis was, at the time, directing the Playback Company, and helping to further develop the actors' ensemble and physical theatre skills. As the performances were for both Palestinian (Arabic) and international (English) speaking audiences, it is essential that the stories are not dialogue dependent, so the use of strong visual and physical theatre skills are key.

Playback Theatre, created in 1975 by Fox and Salas, is a model where a company of actors enact stories offered up by the audience. After each enactment another follows: there is no

discussion or exploration of transformative action. However, Rivers proposes that dialectic process is occurring:

‘.. over the course of an event, a network of interrelated stories inevitably emerges – a multifaceted narrative that describes and dialogues about the struggles, resources and predicaments of a community’ (2015: 156).

Playback was introduced to the Freedom Theatre by Ben Rivers offering audiences both a pedagogic and therapeutic experience. This participatory theatre model serves Palestinian audiences who are maybe geographically isolated to come together, share stories and connect. The opportunity to participate in the performance also provides a sense of being heard, valued and acknowledged. For the international audiences on the Freedom Bus Experience, the performances offer insight into the reality of Israeli occupation and the complexities of ordinary Palestinian people’s lives. The Freedom Bus Experience (accessed 2018) was created in 2011 to enable international visitors to tour the West Bank with the Playback Company to participate in cultural activism.

The Playback model has, however, attracted criticism from academics such as Thompson, who believe the use of stories can potentially reinforce, ‘harmful or non-constructive narratives’ (Rivers 2018, 283). The stories offered up by the audience depend on the complex role the Playback actors and facilitator play not to interpret or misrepresent stories. Indeed performances maybe entirely dependent on the actor’s skills to not overly simplify, introduce bias or ‘colonize’ (283) the story. As each story is offered up by the audience a narrative is created, as Rivers describes above, so that interconnecting stories could reinforce a singular argument, viewpoint or perspective. However, it is a lack of agency or ‘guarantee of

subsequent action' (282) that attracts greater criticism. So what is the role of the international by-stander audience at a Playback performance? The Freedom Theatre Bus Experience blog states that Playback performances provide audiences with the opportunity to:

'.. hear stories and see situations first hand, engages all of our senses. .. we listen, taste, and feel a piece of the daily reality of life in the Jordan Valley, with all its hardship and struggle. This visceral experience stays with us, mobilising us, and informing our own activism and solidarity when we return to our own countries.' (As of September 2018, the Freedom Bus WordPress blog)

The use of Playback Theatre within Palestine goes beyond the reportage allowing, particularly international audiences, to grasp more than just facts. However, the structure does not facilitate any critical reflection or actively encourage a political response. The reference to 'mobilising us and informing our own activism' (2018), is a supposition that is neither explored nor encouraged during the evening.

The performance I saw had only enacted a couple of stories, when a Palestinian Farmer came up on stage to share this story:

'Each day I go to a nearby well to get water for my herd of goats, but I am stopped and told, at gun point by the Israeli Defence Force, to empty the buckets and return to my goats without water.' (anecdotal 2013)

The issue of diverting water away from the farmer's grazing land to the nearby Israeli Roi settlement is well documented, but this area is also a military training ground. Indeed, the boom of low flying military aircraft throughout the evening acted as a constant reminder of the IDF's presence. The Playback actors had acted out the farmer's story, but the farmer,

having watched his story performed, was not satisfied and suddenly turned on the audience, confronting us, saying *'You listen to our stories - but what do you do? You want to help? Then come with me now.'* The actors froze on stage, the audience was passive, whilst the facilitator seemed overwhelmed. There was an awkward silence. The actors broke down into tears saying *'We're just actors'*, and the farmer continued to challenge the international audience with *'You want to help? Then come with me now, and stand up to the Israeli soldiers'* pointing to the exit of the tent. The audience, including myself, did nothing. We were in a theatrical construct and unsure of our role. The evening ended when Travis spoke from behind the audience ending with *'...change will come sometime, soon'* (anecdote 2013). But this platitude left both the farmer, the audience and myself troubled. We were overwhelmed by the request to take action and the potential risks involved. The event could have empowered the spectators as by-stander to protect the farmer from the IDF to get water for his grazing stock. Instead, we remained passive - unable to move and not activists willing to risk our lives. Is this what Rancière suggests as a failure of theatre when it creates passivity for the spectators? Or where the use of Forum Theatre could have possibly facilitated the spectators?

It is worth reflecting, briefly, on the creation of Forum Theatre to empower spectators and what the circumstances were for the Brazilian theatre director, Augusto Boal. Boal was performing in an agitprop theatre piece when he was confronted by a member of the audience, Virgilio (worker), who implores Boal and his actors, to join their fight against the Colonel (the land owner) and start an armed revolution (Boal 1995). It is then that Boal realises, whilst advocating that the audience should take up arms, he is not willing to spill his own blood. This event led Boal to create Forum Theatre, a forum where the audience, not as spectators but as spect-actors are empowered to act. The spect-actors, who identify with the oppressed (protagonist), co-create an outcome that is right for them. The actors are

therefore not didactically instructing the audience into action, but facilitating an enquiry into and rehearsing the spect-actor's possible solutions. Although the roles are not the same in the Playback example, it's the audience that is confronted by the oppressed and not the actors, the dilemma is the same. To take action or not. Virgilio's challenge led Boal to the create Forum Theatre, and here, the Palestinian farmer's intervention had similar effects on my own practice. This event would not only contribute directly to my production of *The Kites Are Flying*, but two years later, a conversation with Amnesty International (Wirksworth Branch) would provide me with an artistic opportunity to create a theatrical model that could explore the role of the tritagonist. But, would audiences think of themselves as by-standers being able to make a difference within an international conflict? Would audiences engage to the point of crossing the dramaturgical divide?

Synopsis

Acting Alone presented multiple intertwining stories with historical characters such as Irena Sendler (who saved 2,500 children from the Warsaw Ghetto) and Rachel Corrie (who was killed defending Palestinian homes from Israeli demolition). It also incorporated verbatim accounts of people that I met in Israel and Palestine including an outspoken United Nations Lawyer and a young Israeli soldier from Birmingham. These accounts were woven into autobiographical experiences witnessing the Playback Theatre performance. The Palestinian Farmer's story started the piece and was returned to throughout, culminating at the end in the audience being asked to resolve the dilemma of the farmer, confronting them with 'You want to help? Then come with me now.' I then walk into the auditorium to stand with the audience looking back onto the empty stage where the farmer's question still hangs, stating the final lines of the piece:

‘He’s asking for my help. I’m asking for your help. Help me.

I knew I had to do something, which is why I’m standing here talking to you tonight. But I don’t know how this evening ends. I don’t know the answers.

I don’t know how **we** end this show.’ (Branson/Hunt 2014: 33)

Acting Alone used a range of theatrical devices from Wake’s Reality Theatre spectrum (Brown 2010: 6) including: autobiographical, historical, documentary and verbatim. The juxtaposition of the different devices provided audiences with a rich layering of narratives that provided both gravity and credibility. Verbatim theatre has been used extensively in the UK, Australia and US particularly when exploring social-political issues. Anderson and Wilkinson (2007) note the resurgence of an appetite for verbatim, particularly in relation to human rights issues. Audiences increasingly want to hear real stories; seeing them as a more reliable source of information, against media bias or ‘fake’ news. Thus the amalgam of human rights theatre using verbatim and autobiographical material produces a powerful authentic voice. The authentic voice combined with embodied knowledge produced an honesty and vulnerability for audiences to both empathise and connect with me as performer. This helped to create a strong and credible performer/audience relationship. Although, at times, for some audiences, who held different ideological beliefs, there was a reluctance to engage with alternative narratives and even contest my autobiographical accounts, but I will return to this later.

Immersive By-stander or Tritagonist

The design of *Acting Alone* was to inspire, provoke and engage audiences to consider, as the tritagonist, what actions are possible to bring to bear externally on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Boal’s Forum Theatre model creates a safe space where spect-actors, as the oppressed, can ‘rehearse’ future actions to challenge their oppression. Thompson refines this

in *Performance Affects* (2009) illustrating that action against oppressive regimes, without awareness of the real dangers involved, could lead to potentially fatal consequences. Thompson examines the differences between strategic and tactical action that if the oppressed, as the weaker party, take actions without examining the wider strategic context, actions may be 'sadly limited' (36). This was certainly the case during the Playback performance. The audience were only too aware of the limited tactical actions available to them that evening. However, I would argue that the options open to the tritagonist within an international context are under-explored, and theatrical models within which to explore strategic options need further investigation. A safe space, in order to consider a range of actions was created in *Acting Alone* through the blurring of the performer/audience relationship. So how was this achieved?

As the audience entered the auditorium I was already in the space, preparing for the performance, handing out various items such as: empty jam jars, tea light candles, sheets of paper with typed quotes and plastic rulers, asking the audience '*Can you help me please?*' (Branson/Hunt 2015). This request created a contract of participation that would be relied upon during and at the end of the performance. Contemporary upbeat Palestinian music played throughout this preparation including: El Kofeyye Arabeyye by Shadia Mansour, a female hip hop artist. For some audiences this informal beginning may have been confronting or even uncomfortable but there was no pressure to participate, only an invitation. The performance begins with me, as the actor standing in the auditorium amongst the audience. Staring back at an empty stage; the music fades, but my vocal tone does not change from the informal '*Can you help me please?*' to the formal scripted material. I was interested in blurring the real and the enacted, how an audience could become immersed into the performance. Transforming seamlessly from the audience space to empty performance stage my journey

was not distinguishable by a shift in light or vocal quality. At some venues some audience members did not realise the performance had begun and continued to respond to my questions and doubts: *'Will I remember my lines? Maybe someone will come up and help me?'* (2015) 'Yes' replied a member of the audience once, who then stood up as if to join me on stage. This blurring of interaction between performer and audience, between the performance and the real, was exactly what Branson and I had intended. This performative fluidity was partially inspired by Tim Crouch's *The Author* (2009) which also subverts the audience/performer relationship, achieving dynamic moments of audience culpability.

Described by Crouch as 'abuse carried out in the name of the spectator' (Crouch 2016) *The Author* is staged in ~~the~~ the traverse, with an empty performance space, the audience and actors sitting amongst each other. As the piece unfolds, we are given descriptions of violence ending with the author disclosing an act of child sex abuse. At this point the spectators question their role in listening to these paedophilic actions. Is this real? Is he telling us the truth? Some members of the audience, not wishing to listen anymore, stand up and walk out, whilst others remain. But by staying do they condone the author's actions by their continued presence? The night I saw the production some people did stand up, shouting 'shame' and left. The boundaries are further blurred by wondering if the people walking out are genuinely members of the audience or are they actors? The spectators have a choice; listen to the abuse or take action and leave.

I was interested in drawing on this model, creating a structure that would explore the audience's culpability as by-stander and tritagonist within an international human rights abuse, whilst not exposing them or making their choice wrong. It would be a gentle encouragement, a re-positioning of those who take action, despite the fear, against the

passivity of others to create 'a new landscape of the possible' (Rancière 2009: 103). An invitation to participate, not simply to spectate but, as Rancière proposes, a re-positioning of theatre as pedagogy 'as opposed to passive voyeurs' (40) but where 'drama means action' (3).

For many the Israeli/Palestinian conflict remains difficult to understand, particularly the role that the British government played in the creation of Israel, culminating with the Balfour Treaty in 1948 and the subsequent displacement of thousands of Palestinians from their land into refugee camps. From behind the safety of international borders, finding a theatrical immediacy, without it being reductive and over simplified, that encourages audiences to explore what can be practically and politically achieved, remains challenging. As well as, given the historical and political complexity of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, what authority did we even have to tell this story? What is the role of the by-stander/tritagonist in this complex conflict? Would we be accused of being partisan or even anti-Semitic? And, if we thought like this, would our audience? Stepping into an arena that is filled with fierce opposition, where every performance would rely on my willingness, as the performer, to respond and engage in facilitating oppositional ideologies was terrifying.

As a witness to the events of the Playback Theatre I was curious as to whether I could re-create this moment of challenge for audiences and create a theatrical immediacy by which the tritagonist felt empowered to make a difference. This could only be established if the audience were 'won over by the empathy that makes them identify with the characters on the stage' as Rancière (2009: 4) suggests. I explored creating this synergy by playing the truth, sharing my fears, sometimes, shaking with nerves but being present with my vulnerability and saying:

‘Have I done my research? Am I well-prepared? Do I know enough? What if in trying to speak out I just reveal my ignorance? ‘She doesn’t know what she’s talking about’. ‘Who is she to have an opinion?’ ‘Who is she to tell this story?’ The fear of not knowing enough can be paralysing.’ (Branson/Hunt 2016: 1)

As the above text illustrates the performance creates an empathetic performer/audience relationship through direct autobiographical address by assuring that I was the same as them. I shared my fear of humiliation, of failing as an actor, acting alone on stage, whilst they were safe within this theatrical construct. This pedagogic immersion would hopefully create participation at the end where the audience, like Boal’s spect-actors, were rehearsing for action. This impact was achieved for some audience members:

‘ ...through your own honesty and questioning of how someone processes and responds to events such as the Palestine situation. .. I really felt your struggle. So your work is not simply just informative but also compels the audience to question how they have responded to the subject and are going to respond to it.’ (Amnesty International Wirksworth branch email 2016)

Feedback from some audience members suggested that the stories had gone beyond the factual, creating a visceral and deep connection to the characters, subject matter and to enquire into possible future action. This outcome was also identified by some critics ‘[*Acting Alone*] succeeds in .. triggering both deep compassion and inspired action in audiences.’ (Reem 2016). Responses during the show were noted: revealing empathetic responses laughter, tears, recognition, anger, followed by comments such as: ‘I wanted to hug you’, and ‘I wanted to stand up and say something’ (anecdotal 2016). These responses indicate that

the immersive performer/audience relationship had created empathy but how did the production actively participate the spectators?

Depending on the venue layout, different techniques evolved to enable audiences to participate directly in preparation for the final moment. For example with end-on fixed seating venues a different approach was needed, as opposed to more adaptable spaces where a cabaret performance style could be utilized. One of the stories I asked the audience to participate in was the Irena Sendler story. At the time of the Nazi occupation Sendler was responsible for rescuing 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw Ghetto. The children's real names and identities were hidden in jam jars and buried in Sendler's garden. During the re-enactment of this story in fixed seated venues the audience were asked to pass jam jars down the aisles. Each audience member took a piece of paper from the jar. On the slips of paper, instead of the children's names, there were various quotations from the show for them as a keepsakes: 'One by one we become many' (Branson/Hunt 2015: 3). Tea lights were placed into the now empty jars and positioned by audience members onto the stage to create a memorial image to the children's parents who lost their lives in the holocaust. The handling of jars, and taking a quotation ensured that physical contact with every member of the audience was established – that everyone was involved with the re-enactment of the story. Audiences enjoyed these gentle but meaningful moments of participation 'I liked the quotes in the jar', 'an amazing way of showing the complexities' (audience 2014), 'Made me question what I would do!' (Twitter, name withheld, 2015).

Not all responses were sympathetic, even to the autobiographical material, one audience member said: 'Are you saying you really felt your life was at risk? I don't believe you!' (anecdotal 2016). On this occasion I recall another member of the audience joining in the

conversation saying: 'I am a human rights solicitor I have worked in Israel – this is exactly what it's like' (anecdotal 2016). Post-show debates were not facilitated in any formal way, but these spontaneous moments of discourse demonstrate that not only did the performance arouse strong responses to the stories it also produced moments of interrelation towards other spectators.

At Nottingham Playhouse (July 2015), only six weeks after a performance of the Freedom Theatre's production of *The Siege* at which there had been boisterous demonstrations outside, *Acting Alone* played to a capacity audience. Two women on the second row were disruptive from the beginning; at times I could even hear specific words 'lies.....lies.....' It was difficult for me sometimes to remain present in the performance and as I approached the end of the piece the duality of remaining present in the performance whilst simultaneously worrying what would happen when I asked the audience to take action became harder. What would the two women say or do? In order to remain in the performance I allowed this anxiety to inform the truthfulness of the moment. When I reached the end I left the silence for as long as possible. It was an intense moment, given the anticipation of what had been said by the two women, and now there was a space to actively participate and cross the dramaturgical divide. At last I simply nodded to the stage manager to indicate that the performance should end and to play the final music cue. There was loud applause from the 200 plus audience, followed immediately with heated debate throughout the auditorium. Groups were created, some even surrounding the women. The debates were animated and dynamic, the piece had created a visceral discourse; opposing views were being challenged and expressed. Messages continued to come in over next few days left on social media and detailed emails including:

‘I believe that you need to rethink the content of the play to provide a much more accurate and balanced view. I consider that the current content does not only stoke the flames of anti-Israeli sentiment, but also could increase the level of anti-Semitism that is so prevalent amongst some groups in the UK and Europe.’ (email, name withheld, 2015)

In response to the claims of anti-Semitism, Branson and I took time and re-examined the material. We had carefully constructed the material in such a way as to suggest that it would indeed be difficult to represent the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in a balanced way. To do so would be to suggest that the two sides of the conflict are equal as Rand Hazou’s paper on *Acting Alone* (2016: 4) reflected: ‘Hunt’s performance enlists the craft of make-believe in an attempt to persuade audiences to engage with Palestinian realities that might normally be marginalised and excluded from public discourse.’ Rivers is also of the opinion that when asked if Freedom Theatre’s Playback performances could tour Israel or that the acting company should include Israeli actors in the productions, he states:

‘This line of thinking arises from a belief that ‘conflict’ between Israelis and Palestinians is caused by a crisis of opposing narratives fuelled by decades of mutual aggressions and propaganda carried out by both sides.’ (2015: 157).

Branson and I set out to create an active forum. A holding space for discourse; we had no answers, only the true stories. However, when working in schools and colleges we had to take extra care, these audiences weren’t self-selecting as with the rest of the tour. The schools and colleges were programming a performance whether the young people were interested in the content or not. Plus we could not rely on teachers having the time to prepare the pupils/students to provide a wider historical context. Therefore, younger audiences were

offered additional post show workshops or question and answer (Q&A) sessions to support learning. We were mindful of the complex material, but the episodic structure of intertwining stories assisted with this and enabled younger audiences to engage with the dramatic material juxtaposed with lighter stories. The young people were interested in the piece on a number of different levels, from creating solo performance using autobiographical material, to engaging with the Israeli/Palestinian conflict directly. Q&A sessions provided them with the opportunity to question and interrogate the historical and political dilemmas in more depth. Some questions were thoughtful asking ‘What we can do?’ to ‘What is going on over there, *exactly?*’ (anonymous 2016). Knowing how to succinctly answer the more complex questions was difficult. However, the biggest challenge of engaging young people’s interest in the conflict is addressing the issue of what has this got to do with me? The response from young people was enthusiastic and this was illustrated by the number of questions and energy in the room following the performance. However, it must be recognised that the invitation to consider taking direct action is harder for young people under the age of sixteen in any political arena least of all an international conflict. So, for some, the questions focused on my work as an actor and my process – ‘How did you learn your lines?’, ‘How long had it taken to rehearse?’ to the more sublime, ‘Have you really been on the tele?’

It was essential that the conflict was accessible, understandable, and that audiences were both emotionally connected but also engaged intellectually to consider their role as tritagonist within the performance. The invitation was offered through the emphasis of the ‘we’ in the final line of the play. However, throughout the tour no-one stepped into the performance space to offer a solution. Was this a failure of the piece? Perhaps. But in relation to crossing the performer/audience divide, most audiences were keen to engage after the show. Reports of taking political action as a result of seeing the show came later - often by

email and social media comments including: 'It didn't prick my conscience, it stabbed it.' (Twitter accessed 2016) and 'it's made me want to do something' (anonymous 2016). An audience member approached me two years after seeing the pilot performance saying 'after watching *Acting Alone* I was so moved, I became involved in volunteering at Derby Refugee Centre' (anecdotal 2016). This comment, although anecdotal, indicates that some action was taken.

Acting Alone did produce anecdotal impact, for some audiences, as indicated from the comments above, but there were also criticisms. One reviewer stated 'theatre that aims to make a difference should give voice to those most affected by the conflict, not to the Westerners who are free to walk away' (Hartley 2016). I agree. However, *Acting Alone* was about the people who are free to walk away. To negate the role of the international community as by-stander or, as I propose tritagonist, would be to deny any responsibility. The obligation of the witnesses of these stories to be in action and to galvanise the actions of others is essential if real change is to be achieved. As artists we must always ask ourselves questions – who is my audience? What am I saying? And when making theatre about refugees, as Dennis (2008: 367) asks: 'Who is there? Who is absent? What assumptions are we making?' Of course stories of Palestinian oppression should be told by Palestinians, as evidenced by the international tours of *The Siege* by The Freedom Theatre Company. But equally the tritagonist role has to be challenged, structures created to empower, and test effective action to ensure that pressure is continued and does not get lost in the melee of human rights abuses and competing international atrocities.

In conclusion, the experience of researching and performing *Acting Alone* has contributed to my practice, both as performer and researcher. Audiences were mixed and varied in their

political, ideological and religious beliefs creating a rich forum within which a genuine discourse was opened up. *Acting Alone* provided audiences with an opportunity to explore what strategic options are possible for the by-stander or tritagonist. As the Freedom Theatre's Playback Blog states the intention is to 'mobilize' international audiences and to 'take up activism' back in their home country (2018). *Acting Alone*, it could be argued, provided a space within which spect-actors could consider a response to the Palestinian Farmer's question 'After you have listened to our stories, what do you do?' (Branson/Hunt 2015). Some audiences did take action, engaged pedagogically and most critically reflected on the conflict. As Rancière (2009) claims a different relationship opens up when a drama engages spectators to become a 'scientific investigator or experimenter who observes phenomena and searches for their causes' (4). For those audiences who were critical of the bias of the stories, I would still argue that their attendance and engagement in discourse following the performance suggests Rancière's abandonment of passivity.

The production created a model of experimentation exploring the role of the tritagonist from an international perspective. As the British Theatre Guide observed of *Acting Alone*, 'Theatre can help ensure that those suffering injustice are not isolated. The solidarity of those inside Palestine and those beyond makes sure that those wanting change are not acting alone.' (McKenna 2016). The convergence of various community and political theatre models and how these are genealogically linked would be worth greater critical analysis. Engaging audiences in controversial international conflicts does highlight contemporary audiences' appetite for political theatre, and continuing to explore human rights issues from a tritagonist position, offers exciting possibilities for future applied theatre practice.

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