



King's College London and Black Theatre Live

Audience Development Report: A Study of the Impact of Macbeth at Margate and Poole

Helen Pack and Ketaki Varma

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About the Authors

Helen Pack studied an MA in Cultural and Creative Industries at King's College London, 2014-15. Prior to this she studied Communication and Media Studies BSc at Loughborough University.

I have tailored my study interests during MA to focus on my interests in theatre, and following my degree hope to gain employment in this sector. I have held another internship with a theatre service company in central London, as well as voluntary work with a small producing theatre company. I was a highly active member of the Loughborough Student's Union's Shakespeare Society. My research interests involve audience opinion and response, and how this is influenced by external factors – which has been reflected in my undergraduate and postgraduate dissertation topics, as well as my interest in being involved with this project. I have enjoyed and learnt much from this project and hope it can lead to further research of the importance of culturally diverse theatre in the UK.

Ketaki Varma studied an MA in Arts and Cultural Management at King's College London, 2014-15. Her undergraduate degree is in English Literature from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi.

My interests are diverse, with a love for culture and the arts being a common factor. I have interned with a community arts centre in East London, organized workshops for children with a theatre group in Mumbai and spent a summer interning with Lonely Planet in New Delhi. I have been a part of both the Shakespeare Society and the English Literary Society at university. One of my main areas of interest includes increasing accessibility of the arts to different sections of society and promotion of different cultures. The main attraction of a project like the Black Theatre Live national touring consortium lay in its goal to effect a positive and long-term change for BAME touring theatre in the UK. I have enjoyed and am grateful to have been part of this dynamic enterprise.

This project: This research project was provided as a collaborative internship between Black Theatre Live, Tara Arts and King's College London.

The authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this report.

Special Thanks and Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the collaborators for providing this internship opportunity. We would like to mention Jonathan Kennedy and Dr. Roberta Comunian who, both, provided much support and advice whilst conducting the research and writing the report.

Furthermore, we would like to thank the staff at the Theatre Royal Margate and Poole Lighthouse for their help whilst conducting the research in the venues.

Lastly we would like to thank those who took part in the research – Jatinder Verma, Hardish Virk, and the audiences at the performances of each location.

Introduction

In the last few decades, the British theatre industry has come under increasing scrutiny regarding the involvement of ethnic minorities in its workforce. In an increasingly globalised world where inter-continental migration is on the rise, issues of diversity have become an important consideration in British politics and cultural policies. This is reflected, for example, in the Arts Council England's (ACE) ethos, with various publications on diversity in the arts – such as making a creative case for diversity (ACE, 2014). Within this context, Black Theatre Live (BTL), a national touring consortium of eight leading theatres in England led by Tara Arts, represents an effort to increase the scope and impact of BAME touring theatre in England. Through a sustainable three-year programme, BTL aims to effect change for BAME theatre across the country through its tours, audience development strategies and community engagement plans. This report will examine the relevance of the consortium by providing an analysis of the impact of Tara Arts' *Macbeth* in Poole and Margate.

The first section of this paper provides the background to Tara Arts and the decision to choose *Macbeth*. The choice of *Macbeth* is important, not only due to the contemporary context of the 2015 general election and UKIP's Nigel Farage as a candidate in Margate, but also within the framework of media attention and political commentary on migration, religion, and preserving British values. Also significant is the main agenda behind BTL: the need for committed leadership to expand the repertoire of culturally diverse theatre in the UK, making it accessible and bringing in newer audiences. Keeping this in mind, the second part of the report focuses on the two towns used as case studies in our research – Margate and Poole – and their significance in terms of ethnic diversity and their specific regional cultural policies. Finally, there is an empirical analysis of our primary research in order to gauge audience responses to BAME theatre, identify key motivational factors for audience attendance, and examine the audiences' views on culturally diverse theatre. This report aims to, thus, contribute to the audience development programme for future BTL tours

specifically, as well as provide the basis for further enquiry and research into the issue of diversity in British theatre.

Tara Arts and *Macbeth*

Tara Arts was founded in 1977 by the Artistic Director Jatinder Verma with an aim to create a home for global cross-cultural theatre based in London. The company is renowned for its touring productions within the BAME sector, and Tara Arts' collaboration with BTL aims to increase the exposure of such BAME theatre productions. Hardish Virk, BTL's partner for marketing and audience development, while discussing *Macbeth*, talks of the importance of articulating a strategy to outline the key points of the show, and doing so for "not just the British-Asian demographic or just the Shakespeare audience but beyond that as well" (Virk, 2015). Verma supports by explaining how the play is relevant to contemporary society and current events surrounding notions of evil and ambition:

"I felt there's actually something about the way in which evil is delineated in the play. You see its emergence and then the consequence of it. Which I felt really suited the time, I mean if we think about ISIS and all that stuff that's going on, what it really is about is a fundamental evil that's come about of all sorts of reason and impurities, ambition, all of that is mixed in. So it seemed to me that this is a play that we need to now look at, and that's really how it started."
(Verma, 2015)

Verma did not want to change the text or names of the play, but also knew he wanted a modern Asian setting; the play is combined with elements of Indian culture from clothing, sound and other cultural features – notably the equivalent alternative of the witches as hijras – a term in South Asian countries, such as India, to describe someone as transsexual or transgender. This gives an idea of how Tara Arts is presenting cross-cultural theatre to appeal to broad audiences in the UK.

Location

The locations chosen for the research were selected on the basis of their potential for audience development opportunities for touring theatre and their uniform demographics. Margate and Poole are both seaside towns with predominately white populations: 94% and 96% respectively (2011 Census). Both locations have an average aged audience of 50-60+ with growing family and student audiences from nearby cities such as Canterbury, rural Dorset, Dorchester and Bournemouth. They also have an interesting engagement with arts and culture. The Theatre Royal Margate dates back to 1787, with a conversion in 1874. Poole too has a history of interdisciplinary arts, albeit not as long as Theatre Royal Margate, having opened originally in 1978 as Poole Arts Centre, and reopened in 2002 as Lighthouse after ACE funding. The diverse background of these towns and their respective cultural institutions highlights their relevance to BTL in building a sustainable programme for BAME touring productions across England. The Theatre Royal Margate and Lighthouse are venues that are willing to make a commitment to such theatre, and it is thus important to study how their existing and new audiences react to touring BAME productions.

Cultural Policy and Cultural Diversity in Theatre

With the recent 2015 general election, the issue of cultural policy and funding provisions has heightened, with arts critics commenting on the situation – notably Lyn Gardner (2015) saying how “mounting cuts to local authority budgets will reduce arts funding”. With this in mind, it is clear that considerations need to be made in terms of both national and local cultural policies. With much funding going to ‘national’ organizations, largely based in London, local councils are trying to compete for funding for their regional arts and cultural organizations.

Margate is located within Thanet District Council, which has been classed as the 85th most deprived district in England, out of 354 (Thanet District Council). Thanet saw an industry decline from 1950s due to a drop in tourism to the local area, and so Thanet Council has been working on a project –

the Destination Management Plan – to regenerate the area with a focus on culture and heritage. With Thanet Council’s local cultural policy strategy, Margate has been recognised as part of the top 20 most creative towns in the country. With this new cultural status, along with being home to the Theatre Royal Margate – the second oldest theatre in the country and a Grade 11 listed building – it also no wonder that public sector funding has been awarded to further develop the area as an emerging arts scene.

Lighthouse is the largest regional arts centre in the UK and is also known for being home to the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. As a multi-disciplinary arts centre, it is understandable that Lighthouse continues to receive funding from the ACE, with annual increases. This has allowed the development of a Borough of Poole Arts Service, which aims to increase public participation in Poole – from a wide variety of arts and cultural activities such as performing arts, festivals, film and music (Poole Council). This includes being able to fund those undertaking related projects within Poole in order to provide cultural opportunities and enriching the town.

Ethnic diversity policies must also be considered nationally and regionally. There is a clear difference in ethnic ratios between most of England and London, where the White British population was at 44.9% (ONS, 2011), and a reported 300 languages being spoken over 50 non-indigenous communities (Benedictus, 2005). Politicians and arts professionals have called for a change in the representation of BAME groups both on and offstage stage (Younis, 2014). Critics have praised the ACE’s steps in progressing the status of BAME groups in theatre, with the ACE encouraging organisations to make a “creative case for diversity” for attracting more diverse audiences (Brown, 2014). Both Thanet and Poole Councils have made cases for ethnic diversity by identifying these communities and creating policies that support the needs of these communities – meeting the legal requirements of diversity and inclusivity of the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000). This is supported by the tour of *Macbeth* whereby the BTL consortium, the Theatre Royal

Margate and Lighthouse identified a specific target audience, consisting both of white and BAME audiences, to ensure an inclusive audience development programme but also to build a representative local demographic for attending theatre. This is very encouraging to BAME performing groups in expanding their reach regionally and nationally. Furthermore, it is significant how this current cultural thinking to increase diversity, accompanied by the work of BTL, highlights the need for commitment from policy-making bodies to expand the repertoire of culturally diverse theatre that is produced and toured – of which BTL is critical to this – but also in highlighting the need for more BAME theatre professionals, to encourage long-term change, in senior roles such as managers and artistic directors.

Methodology

The project used a mixed-methods approach generating both qualitative and quantitative data in its research. There were three shows of *Macbeth* at each location – two evening shows and one matinee. We created a single-page survey with multiple-choice questions that were handed out at each of the three shows. An online version of this survey was also emailed to all the audience members after the tour had moved on from the location. The total data from each town was then tabulated and questions were cross-referenced in order to see what dominant patterns emerged.

The research also included semi-structured interviews. A total of eight audience members were interviewed, divided equally between Margate and Poole. The interviews were no longer than ten minutes each. Apart from this, there were interviews with members of the BTL team - Jatinder Verma and Hardish Virk. These interviews were longer and more in-depth, lasting approximately forty and twenty minutes respectively. The interviews were self-transcribed.

The questionnaire and the interview questions, both for the audience and the staff members, are included in the appendix. Keeping in mind the preliminary nature of the research, this methodology

attempts to reflect a cohesive understanding of the impact of *Macbeth* using Margate and Poole as case studies.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents an empirical analysis of the data collected through the primary research at Margate and Poole. It is divided into three broad areas: kinds of audiences, motivation and propensity for further participation.

1. Kinds of Audiences

As discussed previously, statistics show that Margate and Poole are not ethnically diverse towns. This is reflected through the surveys:

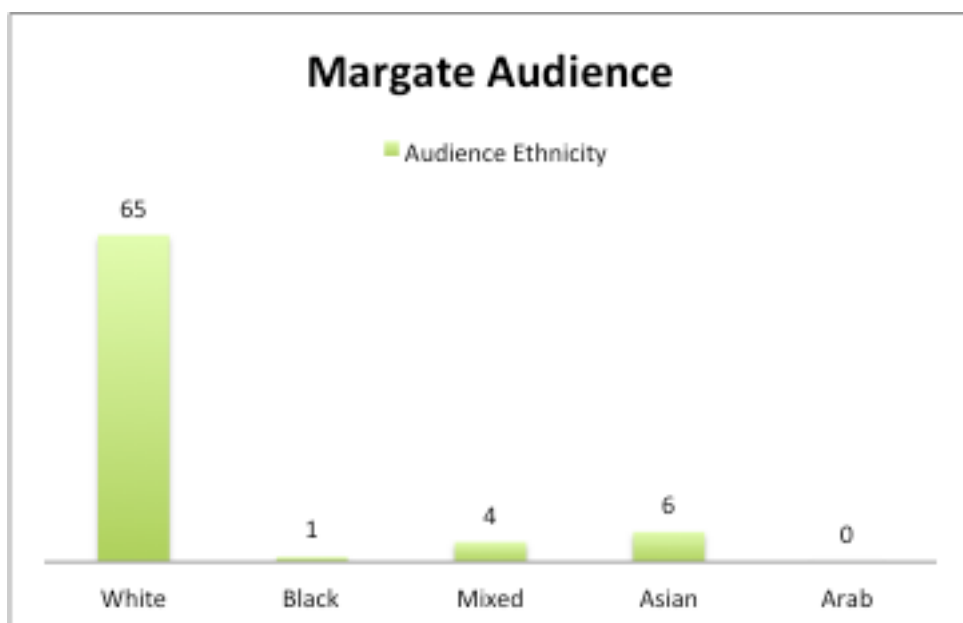


Fig: 1

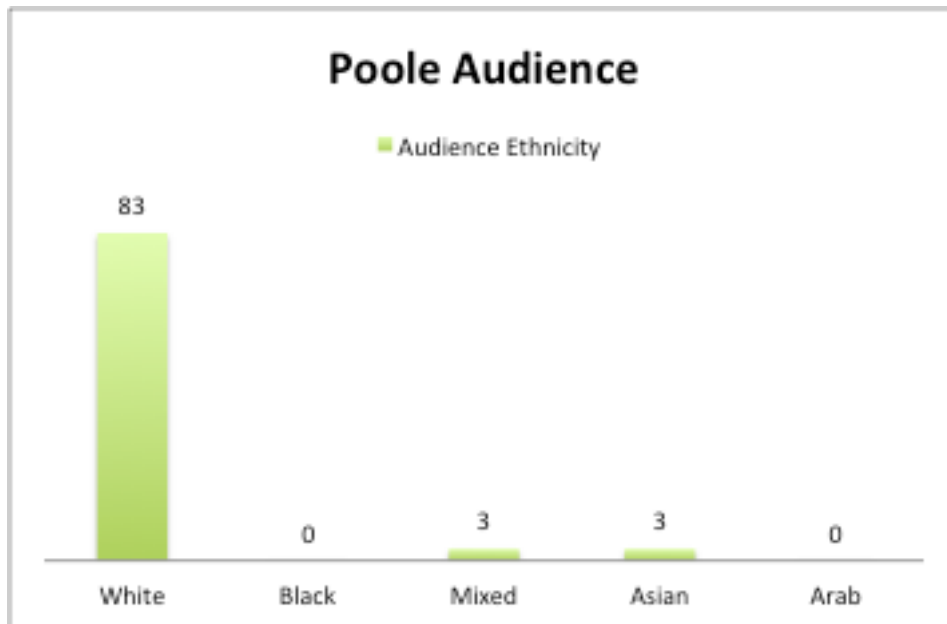


Fig: 2

This shows that 85.50% of the audience in Margate and 93.26% of the audience in Poole were white, which is reflective of the ethnic homogeneity of these towns. These figures are important in order to see how a uniform audience responds to BAME theatre and provides the backdrop for further questioning.

2. Motivations

In order to correctly interpret post-show responses and predict future trends, it is critical to understand the motivations behind choosing to go to the theatre and the choice of play. For the purpose of this particular study, there is a focus on three major impulses: being a regular visitor to the local theatre, enjoying Shakespeare and its adaptations, and curiosity regarding BAME theatre. There was a clear motivation amongst the audience interviewees towards attending due to it being a Shakespeare play:

“I was coming over to see my sister...[who was] going to see Macbeth in Margate and I said oh, good, excellent...I wanted to come” (Audience interview, Margate 2015)

“[Macbeth] is one of my favourite plays, and I thought it would be interesting to see the adaptation” (Audience interview, Margate 2015)

This latter quote also gives an indication, however, that there was also an interest in seeing a cultural adaptation:

“I’m interested both in Shakespeare, particularly Macbeth, and also interested in the idea of it being doing by [an Indian cast]” (Audience interview, Poole 2015)

“For me it was the fact that it was Macbeth and the fact that it was an Indian take on it” (Audience interview, Poole 2015)

“I love the play Macbeth and I love to see different adaptations of it” (Audience interview, Poole 2015)

Considering the demographic of the audiences at both locations, a fourth dimension is cross-referenced with these three factors: how many people had previously seen and enjoyed BAME theatre.

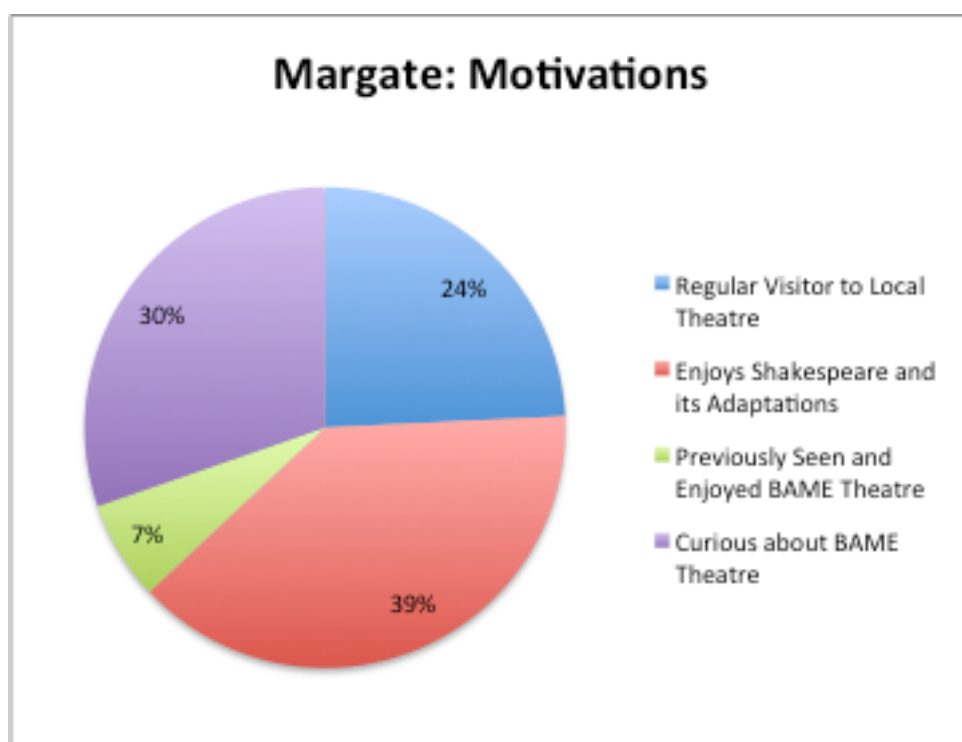


Fig: 3

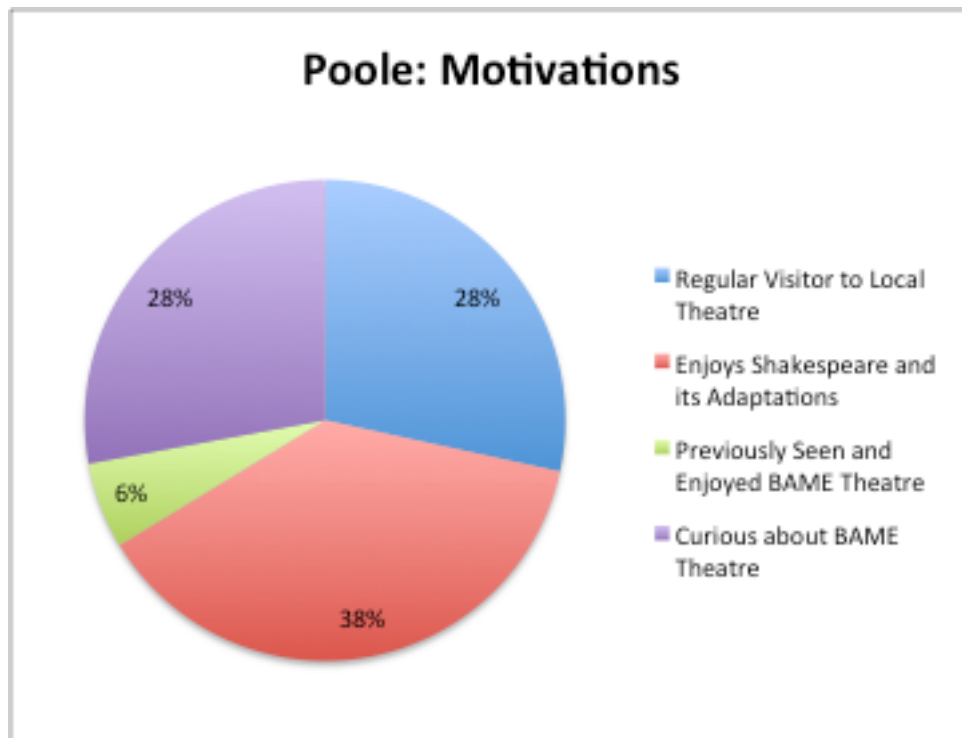


Fig: 4

According to the figures, only 7% of the audience at Margate and 6% of the audience at Poole had previously seen and enjoyed BAME productions. Meanwhile, 30% and 28% of the audiences, respectively, are curious about culturally diverse theatre. This curiosity is also reflected in the above comments taken from audience interviews. This could be an indication of supply-demand inequality; measures must be taken both to promote, market and increase the number of BAME productions in these areas.

3. Propensity for Future Participation

This section examines the post-show responses of the audiences at each location. In order to analyze this in terms of initial reactions to the production as well as in terms of cultural diversity, the survey asked the following questions: if the show was liked and the adaptation was enjoyable, whether BAME theatre adds value to the cultural diversity of an area, whether more culturally diverse theatre is desirable and if future attendance at BAME productions is likely to occur.

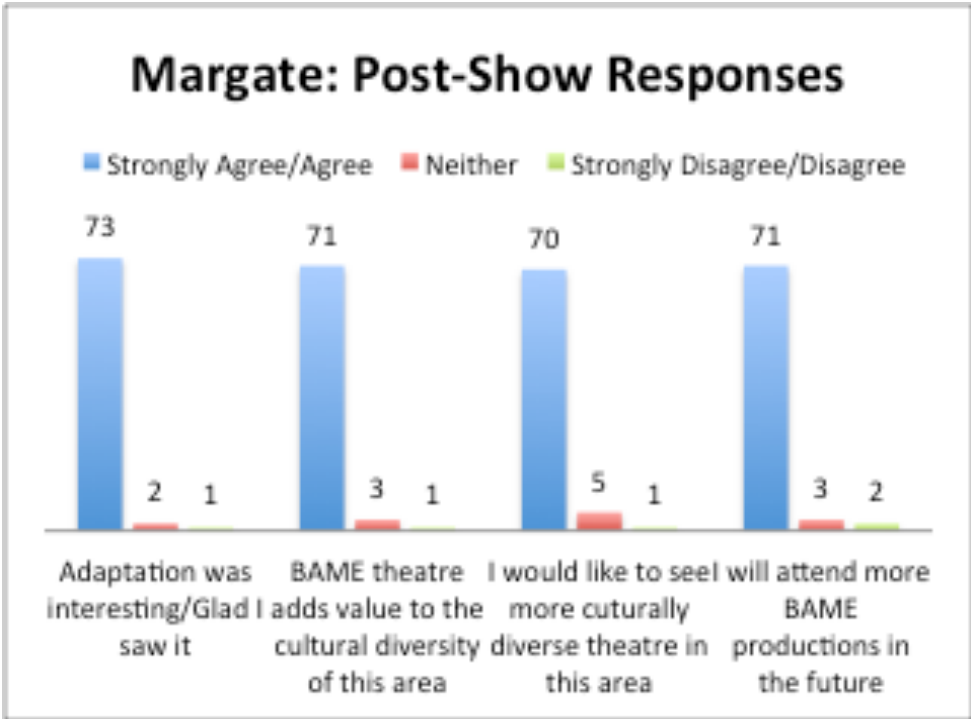


Fig: 5

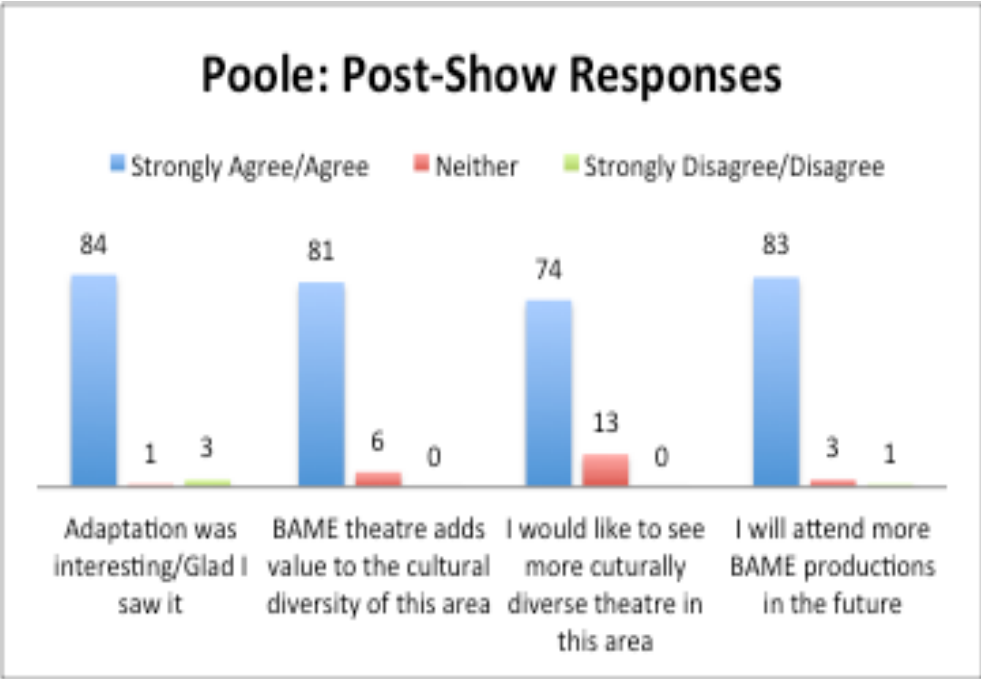


Fig: 6

The statistics at both locations show an overwhelming majority of agreeable responses to each of the parameters being measured. While the first question does not necessarily have any indications of the specific reasons behind liking the play, the following three characteristics point to a positive and encouraging understanding of ethnic diversity. Further, it highlights the success of *Macbeth* and its role as a BAME touring production in dominantly white towns by validating the positive correlation between the pre-show and post-show responses; there is a huge rise in the numbers of audience members between those who had not previously seen any BAME theatre and those who felt it is desirable to have ethnically diverse productions after seeing the show. This is supported by audience members who, when asked if they would like to see more culturally diverse theatre, replied:

“Yes...I was going to say there isn’t much [culturally diverse theatre], but maybe it’s just that I haven’t been aware of it. I shall be more aware of it now.” (Audience interview, Margate 2015)

“I’m happy to come see all different sorts of stuff...I’m open to all sorts of theatre” (Audience interview, Poole 2015)

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to study the impact of Tara Arts’ *Macbeth* at Margate and Poole and thereby provide insight into the relevance of Black Theatre Live’s programme for audience development and promotion of culturally diverse theatre. The primary findings provided by the data has shown a general positive reaction to the production – audiences in both locations enjoyed *Macbeth* and were keen to see more theatre of its kind in the future. There is a clear consensus that exposure to such theatre has been limited in the past, and figures show that the audience acknowledges the value that BAME theatre adds to the cultural diversity of their area. This highlights BTL’s success in its efforts towards promotion of the repertoire of BAME productions in Britain and marks the first step in its agenda for audience development. It shows how a space for culturally diverse theatre must be created in the regional theatre scene.

It is significant to note that this survey provides information about people who enjoy going to the theatre generally. While *Macbeth* created an opportunity for these regular theatregoers, it is important to remember that this is simply one strand of audience development. Further steps need to be taken in order to attract newer audiences. Also, the one overwhelming idea that emerged from the audiences was their desire for good theatre, irrespective of the ethnicity it represents. These factors highlight complexities that need to be explored for future BTL successes.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

There are certain important factors to keep in mind while studying this report:

- The total number of questionnaires from Margate and Poole are 80 and 94 respectively. This includes online surveys.
- From the total surveys, 6 participants were under 16 years of age. Due to ethical constraints, these were not used within the study.
- We have used our discretion in altering certain questionnaires, making sure that the meaning of any response is not compromised in any way.
- If participants have provided more than one answer to a question in the survey, both have been included. This has not affected the final data analysis in any significant manner.
- The survey was altered after the three shows at Margate; this new version was used for all online surveys and the shows at Poole. This change was in the 'Ethnicity' category – the first survey simply had nationalities, whereas the second and final survey has a combination of race and nationality. For example: the former simply had categories like 'British', 'Asian', etc., which was modified to specifically 'White British', 'White Irish', 'Asian – Indian', etc. For the sake of the data analysis, certain assumptions have been made about ethnicity from the first draft of the survey to suit the final version. This has not affected the data in any significant manner.
- The first draft of the survey also lacked a comment section, which was added after Margate.
- The final question of the survey has eight parts to it, and the participant is meant to rate his/her response on a scale of 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. For the sake of easy understanding, the responses 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree', and 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagree' are clubbed together in the figures of this report.

Appendix 2

1. Interview Questions for audience members:

- How did you find out about the show?
- Where have you come from today?
- Could you briefly sum up what you thought of the performance?
- Where there any favourite moments you could think? (Prompts: Any favourite characters, actors of moments)
- Would you like to see more culturally diverse theatre in your area?
- Would you recommend this play to others? If yes, what would you say?

2. Interview Questions for Jatinder Verma:

- How did Tara Arts start?
- How did you become part of Black Theatre Live?
- Why did you choose Macbeth? And why now?
- How did you decide on the cast and crew finally?
- What are the main challenges do you think you're facing with this project/tour?
- What do you think the outcomes of this project would be, maybe in the long-term sense, it's aim and impacts?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

3. Interview Questions for Hardish Virk:

- As a starting point, could you tell us a little bit about Black Theatre Live and what you are aiming to do with it?
- What is your job/role within BTL? (Prompts: What is your background and how did you come to be a part of BTL?)
- Considering your role, what have you envisioned for this project, for Macbeth, and what do you hope to gain out of it? (Prompts: Personally as well as for the project)

- What are the challenges that you expect: a) with Macbeth, b) with the project as a whole and c) in terms of your own role?
- How do you think this project/tour will contribute to audience development for BAME theatre?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3

This is the final draft of the questionnaire used for data analysis:



Audience Questionnaire

1. **Age** under 16 16-19 20-24 25-29 30-34 35-39
 40-44 45-49 50-54 55-59 60-64 65-69
 70-74 75-79 80-84 85 or older Prefer not to say

2. **Gender** Male Female Prefer not to say

3. **Ethnicity**

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>White</p> <input type="checkbox"/> British
<input type="checkbox"/> Irish
<input type="checkbox"/> Gypsy or Irish Traveller
<input type="checkbox"/> Other White background | <p>Mixed</p> <input type="checkbox"/> White and Black Caribbean
<input type="checkbox"/> White and Black African
<input type="checkbox"/> White and Asian
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background* | <p>Asian</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Indian
<input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani
<input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi
<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian
background* |
|---|---|---|

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>Black</p> <input type="checkbox"/> African
<input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Black/African/Caribbean background* | <input type="checkbox"/> Arab
<input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say
<input type="checkbox"/> *What Other (please specify)
..... |
|---|---|

4. **How did you find out about Tara Arts' production of *Macbeth*? Please tick one.**

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Through the venue (programme/ website / mailing list etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Online/social media
<input type="checkbox"/> Print media or print advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Recommendation
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
..... |
|--|--|

5. Who did you see the show with? Please tick one.

- Spouse/partner
- Family
- Friends / Colleagues
- By yourself
- Other (please specify)

.....

6. Please read the following statements and rate them from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree'. Please tick ONLY ONE per statement.

BAME = Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Before attending					
I visit my local theatre venue regularly					
I enjoy Shakespeare and Shakespeare adaptations					
I have previously attended and enjoyed BAME theatre productions					
I was curious about BAME theatre and wanted to see what it was like					
After attending					
I thought the adaptation was interesting and I am glad I saw the show					
I think BAME touring productions add value to the cultural diversity of this area					
I would like to see more diversity (BAME productions) in my local theatre					
I would attend more BAME productions like this again					

7. If you have any further comments please write in the space below.

Appendix 4

This is the approval letter for our ethics form.

Research Ethics Office
King's College London
Rm 5.12 FWB (Waterloo Bridge Wing)
Stamford Street
London
SE1 9NH

6 March 2015

TO: Helen Pack

SUBJECT: Approval of ethics application

Dear Helen,

KCL/14/15-131 - Audience development research for Black Theatre Live

I am pleased to inform you that full approval for your project has been granted by the **A&H** Research Ethics Panel. Any specific conditions of approval are laid out at the end of this letter which should be followed in addition to the standard terms and conditions of approval, to be overseen by your Supervisor:

- Ethical approval is granted for a period of **one year** from **6 March 2015**. You will not receive a reminder that your approval is about to lapse so it is your responsibility to apply for an extension prior to the project lapsing if you need one (see below for instructions).
- You should report any untoward events or unforeseen ethical problems arising from the project to the panel Chairman within a week of the occurrence. Information about the panel may be accessed at:
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/committees/ssh/rebs/index.aspx>
- If you wish to change your project or request an extension of approval, please complete the Modification Proforma. A signed hard copy of this should be submitted to the Research Ethics Office, along with an electronic version to crec-lowrisk@kcl.ac.uk. Please be sure to quote your low risk reference number on all correspondence. Details of how to fill a modification request can be found at:
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/applications/modifications.aspx>
- All research should be conducted in accordance with the King's College London *Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research* available at:
<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/iop/research/office/help/Assets/good20practice20Sept200920FINAL.pdf>

If you require signed confirmation of your approval please email crec-lowrisk@kcl.ac.uk indicating why it is required and the address you would like it to be sent to.

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

We wish you every success with this work.

With best wishes

Annah Whyton – Research Support Assistant

On behalf of

A&H REP Reviewer