



Collaborative Report

Casting an all-Black Shakespeare in a White theatre world:

What can we learn from Black Theatre Live's all Black production of *Hamlet*?

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ABSTRACT

There is an underrepresentation of non-White audiences and practitioners in the UK theatre sector. The precariousness of jobs in the theatre sector contributes to keeping in place this situation. Therefore, more should be known about what Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority Theatre practitioners perceive as valuable tools in building their careers. In order to address this, this study explores the case study of Black Theatre Live's all-Black production of *Hamlet* through in-depth interviews with the cast and crew. The research question it aims to answer is how BTL's *Hamlet* has been of value in empowering the practitioners involved in their careers. Based on thematic analysis, this study finds that the value of BTL's *Hamlet* lies in the opportunities it has provided for the practitioners involved in building knowledge, experience and confidence. The study did not find that there was specific value attached to the production being all Black in terms of its effect on the practitioners' ideas and opinions on working in the sector. Therefore, the production's value lies with the tools the practitioners feel it has given them in a sector in which it is difficult to secure these jobs for currently underrepresented groups.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In light of concerns that in the UK theatre sector there is an underrepresentation of non-White audiences and practitioners, it is important to consider what theatre companies can do to provide better conditions and opportunities for non-White practitioners to change this situation (Arts Council England, 2015; Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, 2016). Therefore this research, conducted in collaboration with Black Theatre Live (BTL), a consortium of 8 regional theatres led by Tara Arts, focuses on uncovering the perspective of Black theatre practitioners on what is of value in empowering them in their careers.

Theatre consortium Black Theatre Live toured the first all Black production of *Hamlet* ever made in the UK through several mid-scale theatres across England in the fall of 2016 (Black Theatre Live, 2017a). It did this in light of the consortium's aim to effect change nationally for "Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Theatre", through a program of commissions and touring (Black Theatre Live, 2017b, para. 1). This aim stems from Tara Arts' executive director Jonathan Kennedy's observation that it became increasingly difficult to secure tours for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) theatre (Jonathan Kennedy, personal communication, 2017). Through BTL's program of commissions, Jeffery Kissoon and Mark Norfolk made an application for an all-Black production of *Hamlet*. Thereby BTL's ambition to effect change for BAME theatre was coupled with the desire of both Kissoon and Norfolk to give

Black theatre practitioners an opportunity to explore Black identity on and off stage and to work with young actors on performing the powerful text of Shakespeare. In consideration of these aims, BTL is interested in finding out what has been the value of its *Hamlet* production.

This research therefore aims to answer the question of how BTL's *Hamlet* has been of value in empowering the practitioners involved in their careers. In doing so, this research will allow BTL to understand how this production fits within its larger mission. Moreover, this case study can serve as a basis for a deeper understanding of how theatre companies can contribute to the career development of BAME theatre practitioners. This research is interpretative and qualitative. The method employed is qualitative interviewing and the cast and crewmembers involved in *Hamlet* are the research participants.

The data collection and analysis for this research have been guided by the following questions:

- How has BTL's *Hamlet* contributed to the careers and artistic development of the practitioners involved?
- What are the opportunities and challenges that the practitioners involved have experienced in this production?
- How has working in an all-Black production influenced the practitioners' ideas or opinions on working in the British theatre sector?

2. LITERATURE

The literature that informs this research has covered three main areas. Firstly, the histories of BAME theatre practice in the UK. An exploration of this history shows that BAME theatre practitioners' work has largely been forced into the margins (Davis and Fuchs, 2006; Godiwala, 2006; Chambers, 2011). This is true both in terms of the roles that BAME performers have been allowed to play as well as in the way in which little BAME performance has been archived and discussed in the writings about theatre history. Because of this lack of attention in the literature to BAME performance, this study has an important part to play in adding the voices of BAME performers to the literature.

Secondly, the literature on UK casting practices was taken into account. An exploration of this literature shows that casting practices in the UK are far from colorblind. With regards to Shakespeare plays, since the 1970s the major companies and regional theatres have cast one or two Asian actors per season and certain roles have become the "Black parts of the Shakespearean canon", meaning that they are portrayed more often by BAME actors than other parts (Rogers, 2013, p. 426). It is therefore important to explore what can be done to challenge this situation and how companies can contribute to empowering BAME practitioners to challenge this situation.

Thirdly, the literature on labor in the cultural industries is explored. This analysis shows that the cultural sector is especially difficult to navigate for

underrepresented groups, of which BAME artists are part (Allen et al., 2012). Work in the cultural sector is precarious and therefore social capital, which is the collection of “resources that can be mobilized through membership of social networks of actors and organizations,” is of major influence on how one navigates this sector (Townley et al., 2009, p.947). As social capital is heavily influenced by ascriptive characteristics and similarity, the currently male dominated, less ethnically diverse, middle class and highly educated workforce is difficult to enter for those who do not meet these characteristics (Lutter, 2015; Skilton, 2008).

The literature about BAME theatre practice in the UK therefore paints a picture of a sector that places BAME theatre artists in the margins. In order to work towards empowering BAME theatre practitioners to challenge this situation, more should be known about the perspective of the practitioners on what is needed in their careers and the way in which theatre companies can contribute to providing this.

3. METHODOLOGY

Therefore the purpose of this study is to address the current gap in knowledge that exists about BAME theatre practitioners' perspectives on what is empowering in building their careers and about how productions can help them in building their careers. As a result, this thesis is focused on describing, understanding and interpreting the experiences of the research participants.

To build this knowledge, the method employed here is qualitative interviewing (Merriam, 2009). While an interview guide was used, there was flexibility in the order in which questions were asked to encourage in-depth exploration of emerging themes (Bryman, 2016). This flexible approach to interviewing fits within the inductive process of research conducted, as it aims to "build" a hypothesis based on emerging themes, rather than testing hypotheses (Merriam, 2009, p. 15).

The data for this study consists of the transcripts of 8 approximately one hour-long interviews conducted between 31 May and 17 July 2017. The sample included two crewmembers and three cast members, who have all been anonymized, as well as the producer, writer and director of *Hamlet*, who each agreed to be fully identified.

The data collected was then subjected to a thematic analysis, in which "patterns" or "themes" were identified and analyzed (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). From this process three main themes emerged:

- Learning from Shakespeare
- Learning from challenges
- Learning from each other

4. FINDINGS

This chapter sets out the themes that emerged from the data analysis by linking them to the research questions set out at the onset of this research.

From the inductive approach taken to the analysis, three main themes emerged that shed light on the research questions. Firstly, it became clear that with regard to the opportunities and challenges experienced in this production, the fact that this was a Shakespeare production proved a challenge for the actors, which they identified as providing an important opportunity to learn. The crew on the other hand, did not mention Shakespeare as a particular challenge or opportunity.

Secondly, with regard to the way in which this production contributed to the career development of the cast and crew involved, it became clear from the responses of both the cast and the crew that they believed they learned a lot from the challenges set by the job assigned to them in the production.

Thirdly, again with regard to the way in which this production contributed to the career development of the cast and crew, the practitioners identified learning from each other as an important part of their experience in this production.

With regard to the research participants' opinions on working in the British theatre sector, the interviewees reported no change. However, they did identify that learning from other Black theatre practitioners was a positive

experience that contributed to an appreciation of their own position in the sector.

5.1 Shakespeare as a challenge and an opportunity

In terms of the challenges that the research participants experienced in the production, most expressed the difficulty of understanding Shakespeare's text and how much time was required to move beyond this to be able to get to act out the story:

“When you've got this text that is really powerful, it takes a lot just to do and just to wrap your head around it and then to communicate with each other and with an audience, throwing other stuff in the way of that can be quite difficult. The one thing I learned is that the play is really hard.” (Actor 1)

The adaptor of Shakespeare's script, Mark Norfolk, also commented on how the difficulty of understanding Shakespeare was something that needed to be surmounted during the rehearsal process. He described how for the actors, the complexity of the writing distracted from understanding the play and their characters:

“It's such a powerful piece of writing. It's ecclesiastical in a way. It's as though he was writing this play and was struck by a bolt of lightning. It talks about the human condition so much. So you really need time to

let the actors get a chance... because they came along and they thought 'oh I've got to learn all these words, they're not thinking about what it means, they're thinking 'I've got to learn it.'" (Mark Norfolk)

The challenge of understanding Shakespeare is further reflected in the actors' comments on how the text has to be performed to be appreciated. While all expressed that their initial response upon their first encounter with Shakespeare's work was negative, it was when they started engaging with the text as performers that they grew to appreciate it:

"Yeah you know in school like a lot of people I hated it (laughs). I thought it was boring and I didn't understand it and I thought why do we do this, people don't speak like this anymore, what is the point? But that is purely because Shakespeare wrote the lines to be acted and to be performed

(...)

It is just when I started doing it, when I started acting it, because it's to do, it's not passive, it's so active and that's why a lot of people, people sort of get a bit, eh, pushed away by Shakespeare (...)" (Actor 2)

"So from the performance side of it, it comes to life when it's performed. That's what it was written for, it wasn't really written for people to sit down and read so eh in performance that's when it really comes alive" (Actor 3)

The actors all identified the fact that the text is over 400 years old as a major part of what makes Shakespeare a difficult piece of writing, yet each of the actors clearly saw the process of coming to understand this language as rewarding:

“It is hard, it is such a hard thing to process, because it’s like a 500 year old language so I think when watching it is it always fun when you see some, when you see a company really *attack* one another with it and really power through”. (Actor 3)

“.... He’s so complex you know and his speeches are so iconic and you have a chance to speak these words which are just over 400 years old and put your own spin on it.” (Actor 2)

These aspects of being in a Shakespeare play proved a challenge to the actors, yet, it also provided an opportunity to learn and to build confidence and flexibility, according to the actors. This is in relation both to learning to speak more powerfully as well as to being able to deal with complex characters. One actor expressed that he found Shakespeare a real challenge, but that this helped him in gaining strength as a performer:

“Shakespeare is its own thing, it’s its own entity, so I definitely want to do more. Eh I think it just strengthens your acting as a whole. It just

gives you power and grounding and your voice becomes stronger so I just think all these things help you in acting anyway.

(...)

I think yeah any actor should want to play *Hamlet*, male or female. Just because he's so he's so complex you know and his speeches are so iconic and you have a chance to speak these words which are just over 400 years old and put your own spin on it." (Actor 2)

He also described a moment in the play when his character receives a piece of terrible news and how this challenging moment on stage has taught him how to deal with similar moments in other roles he might play:

"You can't prepare for that moment as well, you just got to live that moment. Eh so yeah it just really told me how to live, just how to live on stage really and not judge moments as well, just let moments happen and let them happen every night." (Actor 2).

His colleague agrees and states that he was able to use what he had learned from working on the *Hamlet* production in the job that he was doing now:

"A lot yeah a lot that I've got from *Hamlet* I definitely put into Twelfth Night in terms of technical... the technical facility to perform the shows and just gain that confidence of being able to do those plays that are 400 years old" (Actor 3).

These remarks show that the actors value Shakespeare's difficulty in the process of learning in their careers. In terms of the value of BTL's *Hamlet* in empowering practitioners therefore, these responses show that being given the opportunity to work on a Shakespeare play is valued as an empowering experience.

5.2 Building experience to strengthen career prospects

It was not only the experience of performing Shakespeare that provided an opportunity for the practitioners involved to build their strengths within their careers. The cast and crew of *Hamlet* indicated that they felt this production provided them with valuable experience through the challenges set by their jobs, particularly in relation to touring. These challenges allowed them to build their confidence. Moreover, the cast and crew indicated that they gained valuable knowledge by learning from others.

5.2.1 Touring

For the actors, especially for the ones who are early in their careers, playing in different theatres throughout the tour helped them build confidence and flexibility, as each space was different and audiences responded differently as well. One actor states that touring was "inherently a challenge", because there was only little time to get adjusted to a new theatre.

“You have a couple of days to put everything up (...) and then from the acting point of view going out and getting used to the stage and to the theatre and also to the audiences as well. Because you have to gage in very short amounts of time what kind of audiences they are, whether they are audiences who are eh how can I put it, some audiences are very reserved but they’re listening to what’s happening. Other audiences are very eh boisterous and will talk back to you” (Actor 3)

This experience of never knowing how different audiences will respond or how the space will influence the performance, according to the actors, improved their flexibility:

“The more places you play, the better you become and your adaptability becomes better as well. Because we go from flat stages to raked stages to ‘that’s your entrance today’, ‘that’s your entrance today’ and ‘this is how big your audience is today and those are the points you need to pick out in the audience today.’” (Actor 2)

“There is never a kind of a time where you think ‘oh I know what I’m doing because I’ve been on tours or whatever, it always changes and I think being on tour gives you that flexibility and that mentality to think ‘okay I’m just gonna see what happens, I have to be confident in what I’m doing so that if anything were to change that I can adapt with it and take it on, and use it.’” (Actor 3)

Both actors identified that flexibility and confidence are important characteristics to have in acting, because they allow actors to be consistently better and more reliable to work with. One actor identified that he believes that “doubting yourself” is the biggest thing that constrained him in his career, something he says he recognizes in other actors as well:

“ it’s fatal for actors, because you can be the best actor in the world but if you doubt yourself and you don’t trust yourself to do something you’re gonna fall flat on your face.” (Actor 2)

His colleague adds that the *Hamlet* production taught him to be flexible “in very short amounts of time”, he says: “and then within that still being able to find you know, the play, still being able to deliver the play” (Cast 3). Hereby he indicates that performing requires confidence and flexibility to keep telling the story in a powerful way, even when circumstances or responses to your performance change. The touring aspect of BTL’s *Hamlet*, therefore, gave the practitioners the opportunity to build the confidence they perceive as necessary in their careers.

5.2.2 Overcoming Challenges

Similarly, the crew identified that being set a challenge and having to overcome that helped them build confidence in applying for and working in

other jobs. For one of the crewmembers *Hamlet* was her biggest job so far, which made the process of figuring out her role and responsibilities in the production a challenge. However, the fact that she was able to overcome that, made her more confident in the way in which she approaches future jobs:

“There were a few times when it got a bit hysterical just because of the amount of work I was faced with and I was not familiar with that
(...)

I am able to say that I have done it; I’m able to do it again. Which was a good thing because I was able to get a massive chunk of experience out of that so and it got me further (...) jobs.” (Crewmember 2)

Another crewmember identified that he found a challenge in being prepared for the unexpected. This challenge however taught him to be better organized, which he takes on to future jobs:

“I think the challenge is for me it to try and work like on the go like in the moment and especially in theatre obviously you prepare but sometimes things happen and you’re not really prepared for it, the unexpected things and you have to be always on the ball.
(...)

The ability to like organize many different things cause there is always so much things to focus on and so I feel like I have kind of mastered that in time working on so many productions”

(...)

Just being organized where all the little things go. Which has made me be more organized.” (Crewmember 1)

These comments show that even though each crewmember dealt with different challenges, the opportunity to learn how to overcome these challenges was seen as valuable by the crewmembers. As both respondents here are early career practitioners, it should be taken into account that this result might be especially relevant for practitioners who have recently started out in their careers.

Moreover, the precarious, freelance job market is something that both crewmembers found a challenge to navigate and both therefore believed that the experience they built on *Hamlet* could help them in securing future jobs. This is both through leaving a good impression for potential future employers as well as through building the confidence to continue in a challenging environment. One of the crewmembers expressed being grateful for this opportunity to build her experience, which she otherwise would likely not have gotten this early in her career:

“I think Mark said at the time they wanted to give like untried people a chance which was cool because if someone had advertised this job straight out and I had applied chances are I wouldn't have got it.

Because that's just the way the industry works. There is always

someone with more experience than me ... so the chance to do this is really good.” Crewmember 2)

This experience, she expressed, helped her in applying for other jobs

“Having that on my CV to tour and then being able to apply for other jobs and at the very least get interviews because I have the experience so I guess in that regard it has opened up opportunities.”

(Crewmember 2)

Her colleague expressed a similar effect:

“I’ve got a few people contact me, actually as soon as I finished *Hamlet* somebody messaged me on Facebook and had heard about *Hamlet* said that they.... And I got a job from that. It was a 2 week job.”

(Crewmember 1)

This shows that especially for practitioners who are at an early stage in their career, the opportunity to learn from experience and to build their CV is valuable. In terms of empowering people in their careers, the mere opportunity to work therefore is seen as valuable by practitioners.

5.2.3 Learning from each other

A major theme that runs through the conversations with both the cast and the crew is the importance and value attached to learning from each other. It is predominantly the idea of learning from different points of view and other people's experiences that runs through each of the participants' responses. Taking on these different points of view has helped the practitioners develop a stronger idea about how they want to work in the sector:

“It was good insight for me to sit down especially with the cast because most of them are older and I got a lot of knowledge and wisdom from a lot of talks outside the production about life and everything and it was good to be around these kind of people. And they have a lot of discussion on why they do things so I think that in that whole thing I learned a lot about people and how they work in situations.”

(Crewmember 1)

“Being surrounded by a company, the *Hamlet* Company I should say, who all have their own different ways of doing it, some people have been doing it for years, some people have not been in it for years. But they all bring something fresh to what they do. And I think being able to watch people and say ‘oh I like that from *that* person, I like that from *that* person, and then reflecting that on what I do as well, that's definitely been an influence on what I've been doing” (Actor 3)

The idea of learning from older cast or crewmembers is especially prevalent. While speaking of the first time he met the director, one cast member recalls an experience from another production, which illustrates how learning from more experienced actors has helped him. He was part of a production with Jeffery Kissoon and comments:

“That was great because he’s so experienced and he’s worked so many places, to be able to watch him and see how he prepares etc. was great.” (Actor 2)

He elaborates on this using an example from the *Hamlet* production:

“My relationship to Shakespeare.... Changed a lot because of Jeffery. Because Jeffery is so experienced like, he’s done so much and even though I studied Shakespeare in Drama School, to just hear how he analyzes the text was good.” (Actor 2)

Similarly, another cast member comments on how working with inspiring directors and teachers has helped him in building confidence in his own acting.

“I think it’s been essentially the directors and the teachers that I’ve worked with that have been very much saying that you *can* do it and also people... having role models as well? There is this theatre

company that I worked with (...) they were very much saying you *can* do it, you *have*, you have the ability to do it so just go for it. And as much as it is a hard profession in terms of being you know knocked back and being rejected for lots of jobs [it is good to?] have people believe in you and what you do well.” (Actor 2)

The data here shows that other, especially more experienced professionals are important in empowering practitioners in building motivation and knowledge to grow in their careers. In terms of the value of BTL’s *Hamlet* therefore, the opportunity given to practitioners to learn from others in this production was seen as valuable.

5.3 Ideas and opinions on working in British Theatre Sector

It is interesting in terms of the value of learning from each other, to consider that all actors identified specifically that learning from other BAME practitioners was a positive experience. In the context of a desire to empower BAME practitioners in their careers there seems to be a positive value attached to working with other BAME practitioners and learning from them about their experiences in the sector. It should be noted however that this effect was especially prevalent among the actors, which is likely related to the fact that as part of the creative process, the director brought up questions about what it means to be a Black performer and therefore it was a topic that was engaged with by all the actors. These discussions led to the actors

thinking about their own positions in the theatre, which they all describe as a positive experience.

One actor identified that he believes that “as a Black performer one is aware of one’s ethnicity in whatever one does” (Actor 1). Speaking of working on Shakespeare in general he states that “talking to other actors gives you time to talk about the pros and cons of being a black performer.” (Actor 1)

Another actor states that, he found it “empowering” in terms of “knowing the way you are in the profession” to work with other actors who

“Have been able to work for 20-30 years at all the big companies and have done quite a big spread of work that was really, really eh inspiring.

(...)

From like a very simple eh perspective, seeing people that look a bit like you doing the thing you want to be doing and have been able to do it, it’s just, that was great... and bringing together all the different experiences that they’d had and sharing that with us as well that was really... really great.” (Actor 3)

One of his colleagues elaborated on this point, as he mentioned his appreciation for the opportunities created by talking to older Black actors, stating that

“Just learning from older *Black* actors, about the industry and about what *they* went through in the day, and how difficult it was for them and the appreciation for what *I* have now, even though it needs to get a lot better, you know sort of how they sort of paved the way... eh I really took on and I really appreciated what I learned from them.” (Actor 2)

Thus, the experience of the practitioners involved in BTL’s *Hamlet* shows that speaking to other BAME performers about their experiences can help practitioners in gaining more knowledge about their own position in the sector and give them more confidence in navigating the sector. The fact that an artistic choice was made to have an all Black production sparked these conversations among the practitioners and in that way it contributed to the opportunity to learn from others within this production.

Besides this, the practitioners all identified that they were proud to have been a part of the first all Black *Hamlet* in Britain, an event that they all considered important in setting an example for future BAME practitioners. One cast member calls the idea of an all Black production of *Hamlet* “really refreshing and exciting and encouraging”, because “the fact that this was gonna be all Black, set in Britain, set in today Britain, that was great, it’s just something you don’t really see that often” (Actor 3). He hopes that it will “encourage people to do more of it”, an all Black Shakespeare, while they learn the lessons from

what has been done by Black Theatre Live's *Hamlet*, so that it becomes a normal thing that happens regularly (Actor 3)

One of his colleagues agrees and states that he believes it is crucial that Black Shakespeare productions happen because he thinks "the country still labels us under the big excuse that we are minorities and that we can't do this kind of work" (Actor 1). Something that resonates as well in the comment of another colleague:

"For it to be the first ever Black *Hamlet* in this country is quite amazing I think, I was so surprised that it hadn't been done before and to be involved with it I think... it's brilliant". (Actor 2)

This idea of 'being involved in it' also comes back in the comment of a crewmember that states: "That was the main reason I that I was drawn to it, that it was going to be impactful". (Crewmember 1)

Therefore, while the production might not have been of significant influence on the practitioners' opinions on working in the British theatre sector, it becomes clear from the enthusiastic response of the practitioners involved to the all Black aspect of the production that it is seen as something that is necessary and potentially impactful, which indicates that the practitioners see the sector as lacking in its inclusion of Black theatre artists. However, it should be noted that the practitioners did not report believing that they would

approach their careers differently after this production, based on what they had taken from the artistic direction of the play.

5.4 Discussion

From the case study of BTL's *Hamlet* several things have emerged that are considered important by Black theatre practitioners in empowering them in their careers. These are experience, knowledge and confidence. These were each aspects that the theatre practitioners identified as having developed by being a part of a midscale tour of a Shakespearean play.

In fact, the value of BTL's *Hamlet* seems to lie specifically with providing opportunity, which allows practitioners to learn. The production gave the practitioners involved the opportunity to learn from Shakespeare, from the challenges of working on a midscale tour and from other Black practitioners. The artistic direction of the production on the other hand does not seem to have been of impact on the practitioners with regard to their ideas and opinions on how they would like to work in the sector in the future.

That the practitioners involved in this study identify that gaining experience, knowledge and confidence are important in building their careers sheds light on the desire of BAME theatre companies to create "artistic outlets" for actors and theatre artists and their desire to equip theatre practitioners with experience (Godiwala, 2006, p.126; Davis and Fuchs, 2006; Chambers,

2011). Providing Black theatre practitioners with the opportunity to perform Shakespeare and to build their skills within a production, contributes to this aim. While the artistic decision to employ an entirely Black cast and crew might not have changed the practitioners' ideas on working in the sector, it is the opportunity given to the Black practitioners involved that has contributed to empowering them.

This is especially relevant in light of the literature on inequalities in the cultural industries in general and the performing arts in particular. It is important to give Black theatre practitioners opportunities for work, because of their position in the sector as it stands. Black theatre practitioners often fall under what Allen et al. (2012) call "underrepresented groups" in the cultural industries and casting practices in the UK show that actors from BAME backgrounds are rarely cast in major Shakespearean roles (Rogers, 2013).

Creating the right conditions to allow Black practitioners to develop their careers in a sector in which they are often confined to the margins therefore means providing opportunity for this group specifically. An all Black production on the midscale can contribute to this, simply because it employs a large group of Black practitioners. Moreover, as Shakespeare was identified as an important learning opportunity and currently few Black actors are given the opportunity to play these roles, casting an all-Black Shakespeare provides an opportunity that is not often given to Black actors. Therefore, the that working on Shakespeare, touring and learning from each other were identified as

particular learning opportunities is something that should be taken into account when further developing initiatives that aim to provide opportunities for BAME practitioners.

4. Conclusion

The unequal distribution of jobs in the theatre sector between BAME and White theatre practitioners in the United Kingdom is a topic that demands attention. An exploration of the literature surrounding this topic shows that there are particular challenges that BAME theatre practitioners face in building their careers. The causes for this issue stem from the historical placement of BAME theatre practitioners in the margins of the UK theatre sector. The inequalities have persisted through biases in casting practices and are currently perpetuated by the precariousness of work in the cultural industries and the difficulty of navigating this precariousness for those who do not belong to the White, male, middle class, highly educated group that is currently overrepresented in the sector.

Therefore, this study has set out to explore some of the tools that can be given to BAME theatre practitioners in order to empower them in building their careers within these circumstances. The focus has been on the perspectives of the practitioners involved in an all-Black production of *Hamlet*, as this allows for an in-depth exploration of what they perceive as necessary tools in building their careers. From a set of in-depth interviews it emerged that working on a touring, mid-scale Shakespeare play gave the practitioners the opportunity to build experience and confidence, which they perceive as necessary in their careers. Moreover, the opportunity to work with other Black theatre practitioners provided an opportunity to learn about one's own position in the sector. While this did not necessarily change their opinions on the

sector it did give the practitioners more knowledge and confidence about their own position in the sector. It can therefore be taken away from this study that all-Black productions have a part to play in empowering theatre practitioners who belong to an underrepresented group.

This study has been an in-depth exploration of the opinions and ideas of a small sample of theatre practitioners. The setting of the research within a particular production has allowed for depth as it provided the opportunity to compare responses between participants without having to account for differences in circumstances. It has also allowed for an exploration both of practitioners' ideas on the development of their careers in general and their ideas of how specific aspects of a production can contribute to this development. However, an important limitation to this research is its scope. In order for these findings to be generalizable, a larger sample should be collected and more case studies should be researched. A larger sample of case studies would allow for cross-case comparisons. It would also allow for a comparison between the value of working on in a mixed production and the value of working in an all-Black production in working towards gaining the necessary tools for a career in theatre.

This study however, should be seen as a starting point for further research. It has aimed to address the gap in knowledge about the perspectives of Black theatre practitioners on their careers. As there were no previously developed theories to be tested, this research has been exploratory and aimed to uncover themes that can be tested in further research.

Black Theatre Live decides every year whom it will enable to create a production that will tour throughout the country. In light of its aim to make the theatre sector more diverse, it should not only take into account which audiences it wishes to cater to, but also how it can help empower BAME theatre practitioners in building their careers. Therefore the findings of this study should be considered a starting point for building a strategy based on in-depth knowledge of theatre practitioners' perspectives on their needs in the sector.

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