

Institution: University of East London
Unit of Assessment: 35
Title of case study: Engaging New Theatre Audiences
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research undertaken at the University of East London has confronted the historical lack of documentation, representation and participation in the British theatre by ethnic minority communities, with particular reference to the British Asian community. This work has been used to create and shape the production of important new theatre pieces, as well as to engage and develop new young and diverse audiences for them. Workshops, post-show discussions and symposia relating to the production of these pieces have increased the engagement of these new audiences both with theatre generally, and with the often sensitive, contested, and politically-charged subject-matter of the specific pieces under review. The research has also been used as the basis for the development and delivery of professional development training for emerging theatre artists from minority community backgrounds.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since joining UEL as a Senior Lecturer in 2007, Dominic Hingorani has continued to pursue his long-standing interests in British Asian theatre and theatre for young audiences alongside his roles within professional theatre practice as a writer, director and producer. His research since 2007 has focused on issues of representation, difference, marginalisation and the construction of the nation, with published work particularly addressing the emergence of Asian theatre in Britain since 1976. Herein, he has documented, theorised and disseminated the diverse performance praxis that constitute British Asian theatre, locating them within the narrative of the British theatre, and historicizing and mapping the performance practices and dramaturgies of key practitioners and theatre companies. Research conducted and published by Hingorani since 2007 seeks particularly to connect theatre work produced in Britain during the past thirty years with the socio-political and critical contexts in which it was developed [1, 2, 3].</p> <p>Hingorani takes as his point of departure Naseem Khan's seminal 1976 Arts Council report, which rejects the view of Asian theatre in Britain as an 'exotic extra' and argues that it should, instead, be understood, funded and fostered as an integral part of British theatre. He addresses this marginalisation through representation, research and documentation, his 2010 monograph [1] making visible the performance practice of Asian theatre-makers over the past thirty years. As such, Hingorani's research represents and contests not only the marginal position of Asian theatre in Britain but also, by extension, that of other forms and constituencies positioned on the margins of mainstream performance. His ongoing interest in performance praxis, representation and new audiences is similarly evidenced in his most recent publications [3].</p> <p>Between 2010 and 2013 Hingorani wrote, directed and produced <i>Guantanamo Boy</i>, a play adapted from the critically acclaimed novel for teenagers by Anna Perera [4] as practice-as-research. The play was commissioned by Stratford Circus Arts Centre and produced by Hingorani's own company Brolly, a BME cross arts organisation. The commission was awarded as a result of Hingorani's teaching and learning practice at UEL (in particular his design and delivery of a module on Theatre For Young Audiences for UEL undergraduates), his research in this area, and his experience as a professional theatre maker.</p> <p>The piece was shown at the Stratford Circus Arts Centre in 2012 and, whilst it was originally programmed for 15 performances, popular demand ensured that this was increased to 18. The work was specifically formulated to attract a diverse teenage audience, in concord with the focus in Hingorani's research on British Asian theatre on issues of marginalisation and exclusion from the narrative of the nation. These themes were drawn out in part by the fact</p>

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that the play's lead character is a northern British Asian Muslim boy.

3. References to the research

- [1] Hingorani, D. (2010) *British Asian Theatre – Dramaturgy Process and Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. Submitted to REF2.
- [2] Hingorani, D. (2009) 'Ethnicity and Actor Training – A British Asian Actor Prepares', *South Asian Popular Culture*, 7(3), pp. 164 – 178. Submitted to REF2
- [3] Hingorani, D. (2012) 'Creating Theatre Work for a Diverse Teenage Audience' in *Perspectives and Practices in Theatre For Young Audiences from the UK (and beyond)* Trentham Books. Submitted to REF2
- [4] Hingorani, D. (2012) *Guantanamo Boy* Performance Stratford Circus Arts Centre. 31 January – 12 February 2012. National Tour: Autumn 2013. Submitted to REF2.

External funding delivered between 2008 and 2012 to support the development and production of *Guantanamo Boy* includes: Arts Council England (£25,578); Stratford Circus Arts Centre (£16,000 & £4,000); Stanley Johnson Foundation (£1,500); Unity Trust (£1,000); and Victoria Hall Foundation (£1,600). The national tour in November 2013 is supported by Arts Council England (£48,964) Half Moon Young People's Theatre (£9,865) Stanley Johnson Foundation (£2,000) Human Rights lawyers Association (£4,000).

4. Details of the impact

The production of *Guantanamo Boy* constitutes an **original artistic UK output** produced and created by Hingorani's company, Brolly, a BME cross arts organisation (www.brollyproductions.com). Hingorani's work thereby delivered direct benefits to the Stratford Circus Arts Centre theatre, where the play was staged, through its use as the basis for Hingorani's development of programming for a new teenage audience. The impact of this use of his research is evident in the fact that *Guantanamo Boy* attracted audiences of which 70% were estimated by the theatre to have been new. As such, it **engaged significant new audiences both with theatre generally and, more specifically, with the complex socio-political topics** raised through the play's production, performance and review, including issues of representation, cultural identity and diversity [a].

The play was purposely located within mainstream theatre with the explicit aim of attracting new and diverse young audiences to the theatre by actively contesting the lack of representation of 'other' voices and bodies on the British stage, as espoused by Arts Council England. In so doing, it **responded to pressing public policy relating to the current lack of diversity and representation in the Arts**, including that set out in the 2008 McMasters Review ('Supporting excellence in the arts; from measurement to judgement'), which states 'we live in one of the most diverse societies the world has ever seen, yet this is not reflected in the culture we produce, or in who is producing it'. Furthermore, the creation of a British Asian Muslim as the central character of *Guantanamo Boy* was intended to redress the more specific lack of emotionally challenging theatre work for a diverse teenage audience. As such, it addressed the Arts Council England's 2010 goal for every child and young person to have the opportunity 'to experience the richness of the arts by improving the delivery of arts opportunities for children and young people and raising the standard of art being produced for, with and by children and young people'.

The production was initially scheduled for fifteen performances, but high demand from students from local FE college led to a further three performances in 2012. The piece played, on average, to 92% capacity houses, selling 1387 of a total 1469 tickets available across the duration of its run between January 2012 and February 2012. This represented a very significant achievement in relation to teenage audience development for the Stratford Circus Arts Centre theatre. The majority of the audience were from schools and colleges in Newham,

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and many were from minority communities. The play also acted as a **teaching and learning resource**, supporting pupils' attainment of curriculum criteria including those for Key Stage 4 Citizenship (whose guidelines emphasise a need to understand concepts of democracy and justice, rights and responsibilities, identities and diversity through critical thinking and enquiry) and the English syllabus (which requires students to critically analyse a production and articulate this effectively) [a].

Eight workshops (total of 80 attendees) and seven post-show discussions (total of 610 participants) delivered by Hingorani between January 2012 and March 2012 to accompany the production of *Guantanamo Boy* further enhanced and extended its impacts on theatre participation among young and culturally diverse audiences. Workshop participants ranged from secondary school and FE students. The sessions were held in boroughs such as Tower Hamlets and Stratford, which are among the most diverse boroughs in the country; as a result, a high percentage of participants came from minority community backgrounds. The sessions enabled students to engage directly with the ethnically diverse professional cast and production team of *Guantanamo Boy*, and encouraged them to remain open to taking part themselves in future performing arts events [e].

The use of Hingorani's research to **engage young and ethnically diverse audiences with human rights issues** through theatre promoting the representation of minority voices is similarly evident in his establishment in June 2011 of the *Performing Human Rights* symposium, which featured a performance of the play and a post-show panel discussion. Attended by 135 young people, this was the first of a series of symposia organised in association with the Human Rights Lawyers Association (HRLA), Amnesty International and Penguin Books to accompany the production of *Guantanamo Boy* [b]. The event allowed its young participants to discuss their views on the issues arising from *Guantanamo Boy* concerning human rights and their representation. This, according to an HRLA barrister involved with the Symposium, led to 'vigorous and eager interaction and engagement from the young audience....I was approached by a number of them afterwards to ask questions and a number...even wanted to apply for work experience in the field of Human Rights' [c]. Running alongside the production and tour of *Guantanamo Boy*, the symposia brought together representatives of young people's schools groups, Penguin Spinebreakers, and Youth Amnesty to provide opportunities for agency and engagement. A further *Performing Human Rights* symposium, sponsored by Middle Temple Hall and Blackstone Chambers, will be held at Middle Temple Hall, Inns of Court to launch the national tour of *Guantanamo Boy* on November 17 2013.

Guantanamo Boy was reviewed and featured in several local and national press outlets, including the *British Theatre Guide*, *Time Out*, *Metro*, *Sunday Times*, *Eastern Eye* and *Reuters* [d]. These ensured the **contribution** of the play itself (and of the research underpinning its production) **to media discourse** both about British Asian Theatre and about the political issues invoked by the performance. The media coverage also helped to extend the reach of the play's impacts by raising awareness within a wide new constituency of the existence of theatre work for young audiences addressing the serious issues raised in *Guantanamo Boy* and representing the often marginalised perspectives of characters from the British Asian Muslim community. The production tours nationally in November 2013, when it will appear at the Half Moon Young People' Theatre, London; Hat Factory Theatre, Luton; Middle Temple Hall, Inns of Court, London; Mercury Theatre, Colchester; Burnley Arts Centre, The Drum Theatre, Birmingham; Albany Empire, London. It aims to attract approximately 3,000 audience over 32 performances, extending the reach of these benefits to audiences across the UK.

Hingorani's experience as an actor, writer and theatre director, as well as his expertise and insights resulting from his academic research, has also allowed him to lead **professional development for emerging theatre artists from minority community backgrounds** through his transfer to them of expert skills and knowledge. Since 2008, his expertise in this

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field has led to invitations from influential partners including the Royal Court, the Tamasha Theatre Company [f] and the Old Vic programme to develop and work with more than 120 emerging theatre practitioners from minority communities. Many of those practitioners have since gone on to create their own theatre work and have it produced.

Projects via which Hingorani has delivered this transfer of expert skills and knowledge from academia to theatre practitioners have included: directing rehearsed readings for the Royal Court's 2012 studio and writers programme; contributions to the Tamasha Theatre Company Developing Artists programme (2011) and Developing Artist commissions (2012); and leading Director/Designer workshops through Old Vic New Voices (OVNV), which aims to nurture talent, develop new work and grow audiences at The Old Vic. These projects shared a common commitment to the development of work by artists from minority communities.

A recent conference organised by Hingorani and supported by PALATINE (Performing Arts Learning and Teaching Innovation Network) facilitated the further exchange of specialist knowledge between academic researchers from a number of HEIs, including UEL and Rose Bruford College, and nationally respected performing arts practitioners in theatre for young audiences, such as Anna Ledger and Chris Elwell of Half Moon Young People's theatre. Between February 2011 and July 2011 Hingorani provided **expert consultancy** to the Theatre Royal, Stratford East based on his expertise in critically framing and describing the theatre engagement with minority communities. This involved his evaluation and dissemination of the practice of a verbatim theatre production *Mad Blut* (2010), which examined the issue of knife crime and based specifically within the Black community within Newham. The consultation was funded by JP Morgan (sponsors of the theatre production) and the document produced by Hingorani was used to disseminate Theatre Royal's community theatre practice to a wider audience as a model for community engagement and action on social issues.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[a] Letter from Stratford Circus corroborating new audience figure (using theatre industry recognised Audience View data) and curriculum engagement. Available on request.

[b] Documentary film of Performing Human Rights Symposium
<http://www.brollyproductions.com/#!/symposium>

[c] Statement from Barrister representing Human Rights Lawyers Association involved with the Performing Human Rights Symposium for young audiences. Available on request.

[d] For examples of coverage and reviews of *Guantanamo Boy* in local and national media:

- <http://www.britishtheatreinfo.com/reviews/guantanamo-boy-stratford-circu-7170>;
- <http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/event/45094/guantanamo-boy>;
- *The Metro* Tuesday February 7 2012 p.38 (PDF available on request)
- *Sunday Times Culture* 5 February 2012 (PDF available on request)

[e] A copy of a factual statement from a drama teacher at the Sarah Bonnell School, corroborating the impacts of the workshops delivered by Hingorani to accompany *Guantanamo Boy* on pupils at the school, is available on request.

[f] A copy of a factual statement from the Tamasha Theatre Company, corroborating the delivery and impacts of Hingorani's contribution to training emerging artists from minority communities, is available on request.