

## ***(Re:) Claiming Ballet***

Adesola Akinleye, Ed. Intellect, 2021. 328 pages; \$46.50 (paper).

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*(Re:) Claiming Ballet* provides an alternative perspective of the cultural mapping of ballet and its influences, to debunk its mainstream notion. The text acknowledges marginalized individuals and communities who have shaped the art form. This is an important contribution within the field of dance studies. Authors include dance scholars, professional ballet dancers, teachers, and choreographers from a wide range of backgrounds and geographical locations. This anthology—curated by Adesola Akinleye, Senior Dance Lecturer at Middlesex University and former dancer with the Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH)—gives the reader a brief look into how “native peoples have contributed globally to what ballet is” (7). She discusses its transition from property—belonging to the fifteenth-century Renaissance courts—to art. The author separates ballet from its White, patriarchal and Eurocentric roots when it acted as propaganda within an imperialist policy. This is a strong statement that will encourage open-minded dancers and choreographers to connect ballet with a real-world understanding of many aspects of ballet’s history. This volume fills a gap in the understanding of ballet history, providing the reader a point of contemplation—ballet in relation to colonialism and diversity—for further study.

The book is organized in four parts: *Histories*, *Knowledges*, *Resiliences* and *Consciousness*. Each explores several themes. *Histories* focuses on invisibilized narratives “unravelling how Black people came to be represented in narrative ballets ... unpacking the concept of exoticism” (70). *Knowledges* explores the personal journeys of its contributors and what it has meant to move forward beyond ballet’s strict limitations of skin color and body type. *Resiliences* explores how these challenges can turn into activism. “[DTH] mirrored the radical roots of ballet” (166) as an artistic successor to the Civil Rights Movement—breaking race barriers during worldwide tours. *Consciousnesses* looks at different pedagogies, aesthetics, and spaces which could shape the ever-evolving ballet world’s palette—“debunking stereotypes and reconditioning the social ideals of what beauty is” (232).

The driving philosophy of the text is noteworthy; the book was “written from *within* these communities rather than *about* them” (3). The authors are not aiming to summarize the concept of diversity in ballet, but rather to share a few areas of interest beyond ballet’s mainstream concepts. There are different approaches for reading this book. The reader can either go from cover to cover or use the index to select particular chapters. Each section includes a brief overview to contextualize it. Particularly interesting is the back matter. Most chapters include end notes with further information for deeper research, as well as bibliographic sources. I would have preferred if the editor presented end notes and bibliographic sources together at the end of each section to avoid repetitions. The authors use a formal, fluid language with clear terminology; but a greater number of figures would have strengthened the text.

As a whole, *(Re:) Claiming Ballet* covers the broad spectrum of practices that constitute the ballet diaspora in the twenty-first century. It focuses on the meaning of ballet and how we can keep it alive and resilient, “becoming good *dancestors*” (x) for the next generation. Ballet must be for everyone—as an expression of the diversity in our community, as have been the current Queer and #MeToo movements. In fact, ballet has been continuously “adapting and reinventing itself [...] to remain relevant to the society it represents” (240). This anthology is a valuable tool for engaging new audiences in ballet; it is a call-to-action for younger generations to connect ballet with their lived worlds. It will be of interest to

academics, researchers, or students working in the fields of dance, theatre, performing arts, and cultural studies—especially within the intersection of gender, race and dance. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to acquire a broader knowledge of ballet as a global art form with the potential to become a key representation of our multicultural society.