

Akram Khan: Dancing New Interculturalism. By **Royona Mitra**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. pp. xviii + 197.

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Royona Mitra's book is the first monograph on the work of the British-Bangladeshi choreographer and dancer Akram Khan. Mitra's study emanates from her PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London, and currently the author is a lecturer in theatre at Brunel University, London. Like Khan, Mitra is trained in South Asian kathak (p. xi). Mitra's hypothesis is that Khan 'is in fact transforming the landscape of British and global contemporary dance through his own embodied approach to new interculturalism' (p. 10). How can this 'new interculturalism' be described and what are its characteristics?

Between 1999 and 2014 (and so at the time of the writing of Mitra's book) the Akram Khan Company created 21 performances, and between 2000 and 2013 they received 22 awards. The work of this company can be considered a seminal contribution to postcolonial dance, and this study is therefore highly relevant to the field. Mitra shows in a complex yet clear way that Khan's choreographies are located in the political contexts of the anti-Muslim Euro-centrism of urban gentrification and postcolonial and decolonizing practices. She discusses, for example, Khan's artistic reflections on the anti-Muslim discourses that came up after the London bombings of 7 July 2005. At the same time, Mitra's aesthetic politics contribute to their critical diversification as the author translates her own spectatorial practice into a new understanding of 'interculturalism' (see below).

In the introduction, Mitra discusses Khan's oeuvre as an answer to Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata* and the concepts of 'intercultural theatre' of the 1980s connected with it. This is followed by seven elaborate case studies in the form of chapters, each corresponding to a significant aesthetic theory and a specific work, starting with *Gnosis* (2010), then reflecting on *Loose in Flight* (1999), *Zero Degrees* (2005) and *Desh* (2011), *Bahok* (2008), and finally, *iTMOi* (2013). The theorems are understood as artistic tactics, and range from 'Body in Action' to 'Auto-Ethnography' to 'Third Space Politics' to 'Queering Normativity'. Finally, Mitra demonstrates that the analysed aesthetic strategies interrelate in such a way that 'Khan's new interculturalism rewrites both Western and South Asian dramaturgies' (p. 155).

Mitra makes complex theoretical connections highly accessible, and describes Khan's fascinating art of dance in a very multi-layered, non-linear way. Through her understanding of 'interculturalism' as embodied practice, she brings the discourse of postcolonial theatre

studies close to dance studies. My only critical point would be that the choice of the notion of the 'new' in 'new' interculturalism implies a linear temporality and progress, which relates Khan's dance practice to a rather vague notion of the 'new' that does not fully do justice to Mitra's own non-linear and multi-layered thinking.

All in all, the book is to be read both as an introduction to post-structural dance studies and cultural studies, as well as an example of a study of the oeuvre of a single artist. How dance studies are inextricably connected with postcolonial and queer concepts is also made apparent here. Upcoming and/or experienced researchers who want to read up about debates in postcolonial dance in the UK will also find abundant material.