

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

## CONTEXTS AND CHOICES

Allana C. Lindgren and Batia Boe Stolar



Canada has a long history of racial and ethnic diversity with a transnational circulation of people and cultural influences. Although the federal government, under the leadership of then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, officially adopted multiculturalism as a policy in 1971, as Lloyd Wong and Shibao Guo have asserted, “Multiculturalism existed demographically in Canada at the time of confederation when the country was formed.”<sup>1</sup> They note, however, that diversity is not necessarily synonymous with equality, as the politically dominant culture in 1867 was still oriented towards the British Empire, rendering the multiplicity of races and ethnicities present in the Dominion of Canada at the time little more than “inequalitarian pluralism.”<sup>2</sup>

Barely 150 years later, diversity has become a key part of the Canada’s self-defined identity; it is a key concept the country uses and celebrates to distinguish itself from other nations. Echoing his father’s sentiments, in a speech delivered in London, UK, in 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated, “Canadians understand that diversity is our strength. We know that Canada has succeeded—culturally, politically, economically—because of our diversity, not in spite of it.”<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding the Prime Minister’s words, racial and ethnic disparities have been another defining aspect of the nation’s colonialist history. The

majority of hate crimes in Canada are motivated by racial or ethnic animosity (followed closely by religious prejudice).<sup>4</sup> In 2017, for instance, Barbara Kentner, an Indigenous woman, was killed from injuries after being hit by a trailer hitch thrown at her by a person in a moving vehicle in Thunder Bay—a city where almost 30 percent of the hate crimes in Canada that are specifically aimed at Indigenous people have occurred.<sup>5</sup> An attack on a mosque in Québec City, also in 2017, left six Muslim men dead and numerous other worshippers wounded. In 2018 and 2019, neo-Nazi recruiting posters were reported in Toronto and Winnipeg. The latter case has led to an investigation of an alleged neo-Nazi with explosives training who had been serving in the army reserves.<sup>6</sup> These examples—just a few of the incidents that occur on a yearly basis—demonstrate the urgent need to address violence sparked by racial and ethnic hatred.

In this light, the policies and laws pertaining to inclusivity that are grappled with on the legislative floors of government and then policed in streets and tested in the courts have real consequences for people's lives. Similarly, the everyday practices of pluralism—and marginalization—found in places of worship and educational institutions, on city streets and rural roads, in print and online media, on television and other modes of popular culture, and on national, city, and indie stages, collectively function as contributing factors that both shape and test the limits of inclusivity and tolerance, sharply foregrounding the uneven contours of opportunity and equity in Canada.

This collection asserts that the arts, specifically dance, have a significant, yet largely unexamined, role to play in the questioning and crafting of our pluralist society. At first, the pairing of dance and the issues of pluralism might seem incongruent. For some, dance may be viewed as apolitical or an activity far removed from attempts to achieve parity when it comes to disproportionate political power. Indeed, the effects of dance endeavours can be fleeting and soon forgotten. Some might suggest that dance activities forestall real change by providing relief from the mounting pressures of intolerable inequity.

The chapters in this collection do not dispute these critiques, but instead ask readers to consider how teachers, choreographers, dancers, presenters, arts administrators, audiences, and reviewers practice pluralism in Canada. Their choreographic works, performance conventions, and attendant media responses reveal how identities and notions of difference are perceived within and beyond racially and ethnically defined communities. Their successes and challenges serve as exemplars and cautions not only for other artists, but also as models that

can be transposed into broader contexts of pluralism. Most notably, like other forms of soft diplomacy, dance can help to “set the stage” for social change. Dance brings people together to engage in non-threatening, non-legislated ways.<sup>7</sup> It provides opportunities to learn about cultures that are different from one’s own. It facilitates moments when groups of people who have been historically marginalized take centre stage—literally and figuratively—and exercise agency. In other words, over the course of this collection, we argue that dance is an effective mode of inquiry to highlight the shifting concerns of pluralism in Canada.

Mindful of this focus, the title of the collection—*Moving Together: Dance and Pluralism in Canada*—can be interpreted in a number of ways. It proposes that dance can and does bring different communities of people together. It invites readers to think about the powerful visual symbolism of having people transcend racial and ethnic divides to dance with and for each other. Paradoxically, this collection also queries if the phrase “moving together” can apply to a single person. In thinking about subjectivity within the context of plurality, how might personal identities be forged from a broad swath of racial and ethnic characteristics? These markers are often further augmented or complicated by gender, class, age, and ability identifications. In this way, how might one’s ever-accruing identities be “moving together” in acknowledgement that intersectionality is a dynamic element in the processes of identity formation and the plurality that defines each one of us?

The aim of this collection is to prompt discussion about the desirability and complications of what exactly “moving together” can mean. Does the phrase indicate the kind of unity in which it is possible to maintain one’s individual identity while forging new alliances, or does “moving together” suggest conformity? While many of the case studies examined in this collection implicitly advance the perspective that dance can be a positive contributor to social change, readers are encouraged to consider the tensions and blind spots that sometimes accompany artistic activism.



## THE POLITICS OF TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this collection, readers will encounter different terms used to discuss racial and ethnic inclusivity. Recognizing the range of descriptors in circulation in the dance community in Canada, no attempt has been made to