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***Walk* in India and South Africa: notes towards a decolonial and transnational feminist politics**

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The essay discusses Maya Rao's *Walk* and The Mothertongue Project's *Walk: South Africa* to explore the languages of transnational and embodied feminist politics that these performances conjure. The two performances are instances of artistic responses to sexualized violence in India and South Africa as they engage with the politics of walking in the city. Working with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's formulation of feminist solidarity (2013) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos's translation-as-dialogue (2014), I discuss the radical forms of feminist methodological imaginations attempted and nurtured by them. This essay examines the political and aesthetic potential of translatability of performance in the world of global asymmetries and the implications it holds for intersectional feminist conversations in the global South.

Keywords: walking; gendered violence; transnational feminism; decoloniality; Maya Rao; The Mothertongue Project

Introduction

Boaventura De Sousa Santos, in *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, articulates the need for achieving a distance from the 'Western critical tradition and political imagination' (2014, p. 213). He proposes intercultural translation between the member states of the global South as a conceptual and political instrument for 'making visible and credible non-Western knowledges and practices that were placed on the other side of the line by abyssal thinking' (p. 226). Preferred over the concept of 'dialogue', he conceives of translation as a mode of building 'thicker alliances' between the global South (p. 214). With its etymological roots in the Greek, the word translation comes from *διάλογος* (*dialogos*), made up of *διά* (*dia*: through) and *λόγος* (*logos*: speech). The intention of a dialogue is not to win an argument, but patient listening to the others. A dialogue allows for collective participation and sharing of experiences, so that prior assumptions can be discarded, and new ways of living imagined.¹

This essay explores translation as a form of dialogue between two performances – Maya Krishna Rao's *Walk* (2012) in India, and The Mothertongue's Project *Walk: South Africa* (2013) in South Africa – as a mode of creating transnational feminist solidarity between artists in the two countries. On 16 December 2012, Jyoti Singh, a 23-year-old medical student from an upwardly mobile lower middle-class family, boarded the

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night bus in Delhi after spending an evening out with her male friend. They had gone to see a movie at an upmarket cinema. Singh was raped and brutally assaulted by six men on the moving bus. She died on 29 December, giving in to her injuries. Rao created and performed *Walk* in the aftermath of this horrific episode of sexualized violence in Delhi on 31 December 2012. On 2 February 2013, 17-year-old Anene Booysen, a Coloured from Bredasdorp in the Western Cape, walked to the neighbourhood tavern for a drink.² The next morning, she was found raped and brutally violated by a man who she met at the tavern, someone she knew from before. Both Singh and Booysen had attempted to inhabit public spaces on their own terms and were punished for doing so. Around the same time, Sara Matchett, Artistic Director and Co-founder of The Mothertongue Project (TMP), a theatre collective working with women and youth in the Western Cape, received an email from Rao that contained a YouTube link of *Walk* (2012).³ Matchett, inspired from Rao's *Walk*, gathered a group of six women comprised of postgraduate and undergraduate students from The University of Cape Town's Drama Department, as well as professional performers. She showed them the footage of Rao's *Walk* and asked them to conceptualize a 10-minute performed translation of Rao's *Walk* that spoke to the challenges of gender-based violence and rape culture in South Africa. *Walk: South Africa* is made up of a series of vignettes that include performed installations and recorded videos, and involve the audience walking, while engaging with live and recorded performances and soundscapes.

I discuss *Walk* and *Walk: South Africa* in the context of their respective engagement with and intervention in the contemporary conversations on space, gender, mobility and sexual violence in India and South Africa respectively. I explore what an embodied transnational feminist politics of solidarity might look like as I examine the engagement of the two performances with walking in the city. The two performances are instances of embodied artistic responses to sexualized violence in the two countries. This essay investigates the political and aesthetic potential of translatability of performance in the world of global asymmetries and the implications it holds for feminist conversations in the global South. When the governments of India and South Africa are increasingly exhibiting fascist tendencies, privacy and rights are under threat, and instances of gendered violence are multiplying, imagining new languages of alliance-building through art performance, outside and beyond what the neoliberal state and the university can tether, might be a way of imagining radical hope and practising transnational feminist solidarity (c.f. Agnes 2013, du Toit 2014, Gqola 2015, Lewis 2009, Roychowdhary 2013).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty emphasizes that a feminist solidarity perspective anchored in decolonization requires 'understanding the historical and experiential specificities and differences of women's lives as well as the historical and experiential connections between women from different national, racial and cultural communities' (2013, p. 548).

The focus is not just on intersections of race, class, gender, nation, and sexuality in different communities of women but on mutuality and co-implication, which suggests attentiveness to the interweaving of the histories of these communities. In addition the focus is simultaneously on individual and collective experiences of oppression and exploitation and of struggle and resistance. (p. 548)

Keeping the focus on 'collective differences' at the centre of analysis and solidarity-building, writes Mohanty, allows for 'framing agency and resistance across the

borders of nation and culture' (p. 549). She provides a useful lens for analysing the relationalities, complexities and contradictions of lived experiences of women across borders, and across a spectrum of gender and sexualities. The focus on the micropolitics of everyday life and local gendered contexts and ideologies is crucial, as it interrogates the implications of the history of colonialism and injustices of global capitalism. In "'Under Western Eyes" Revisited', Mohanty revises and refines her engagement with the politics of location, as she reflects on her own subjectivity of a professor in the U.S academy. The 'under' of the 'Under Western Eyes' was relevant in 1986 when she was a PhD student and first published the landmark essay. Her current writing and teaching takes place from more of an 'inside' of the American academy. Consequently, she finds the binaries of Western/Third World and North/South misleading in the current political arrangement of the globe and, after Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Sun Prakash (1998), prefers to use 'One-Third World/Two-Thirds World'. The latter term highlights the inequalities of wealth not just between nation states, but also the internal conflicts and power-dynamics of a country within the global North/South.

Mohanty's formulations have crucial implications for the sake of this essay: first, my location within One-Third world/Two-Thirds World is not fixed as I straddle both categories. I have the privileges of having been educated and funded by institutions in the One-Third World, but my home, family and solidarities exist in the Two-Thirds World, that is, India. Within my own context, I am middle class, upper caste, able-bodied, and my parents live in Delhi, and enjoy the privileges that come with living in the capital city. I am currently affiliated with a South African university but the precarity of the academic job market looms large in the months ahead. Within South Africa, my university – University of Western Cape – was an apartheid institution for Coloured students and has taken on a non-hegemonic role vis-à-vis previously 'white' universities like the University of Cape Town, and is currently playing an active role in the movement to decolonize the university. Thus, I write from this position, aware of the complexity and integrity it entails.

Second, Mohanty highlights the need to pay attention to the multi-layered and contextual lives of women *within* the national boundaries, to resist a totalizing narrative that subsumes the histories of the periphery under a normative and homogeneous understanding of gender. The leading artists and directors of the two performances, Maya Krishna Rao and Sara Matchett, are privileged women in their own contexts: Rao is an upper class, upper caste artist in Delhi and Matchett is white and a Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies, University of Cape Town. Both the artists have fairly easy access to the privileges of the One-Third world, even though they are residents of the Two-Thirds World, by virtue of their cultural capital, international funding and global networking opportunities. Mohanty's distinction between One-Third/Two-Thirds World becomes especially relevant for the politics of translation of walking as performance in the light of the shifting privileges of the artists and the performers, by virtue of their class, skin colour, age and sexuality. The performances themselves are an embodied example of Mohanty's distinction: when they engage with questions of gender, mobility and violence, the subjectivities of the artists have implications for who is allowed to walk and where, and if walking is aspired for as a pleasure-seeking activity or when it becomes a matter of escaping danger and death. My

analysis of *Walk* and *Walk South Africa* pays careful attention to how power and agency operate internally, as well as how they are produced and co-opted by systems of knowledge production and globalization.

Working with Chandra Talpade Mohanty's formulation of feminist solidarity (2013) and Boaventura De Sousa Santos's translation-as-dialogue (2014), I examine the radical forms of feminist methodological imaginations attempted and nurtured by the two performances. The discussion explores how the two performances of *Walk* encourage a transnational dialogue when Rao's version is translated across cities and continents in the Two-Thirds World. I have included my own auto-ethnographic account of living and walking in Delhi and Cape Town to share how the two cities translated my subjectivity and how I translated my experiences of walking from one to the other: as an insider in the former case, and an outsider in the latter. I have spent over two decades living and walking in Delhi, and ten months in Cape Town. The notes that follow are as much about the city as a placeholder of performance as they are about the city as a performing entity itself, a taxonomy of narrative filtered through resistance and memory.

Cathy Turner and Dee Heddon have already highlighted 'the invisibility of women' (2012, p. 225) in the canonical literature and practices on walking: a 'reiteration of a particular genealogy – or fraternity – which includes Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Henry David Thoreau, André Breton and Guy Debord' (p. 224). The Romantics, Naturalists and, later, Situationists desired 'adventure, danger and the new' that 'presume[d] a universal walker, whose experience is uninfected by gender' (p. 226). Following Doreen Massey (2005), Turner and Heddon propose a philosophy of walking based on an 'embodied experience of space' (p. 227), which does not treat space as external and static but relational, a navigation with the urban that understands the 'contextual nature of risk' (p. 234) and allows room for tensions within the spatial practice. Helen Scalway talks about the anxiety that women go through due to lack of accessibility to public spaces, as opposed to how men engage with the city's spaces. 'Flânerie in its inherently territorial and controlling meanings, is neither possible nor desirable', she writes. Scalway asks to develop practices of 'counter-flânerie' that 'allows for negotiation and regard for the Other: the street where relationship is possible' (2001, n.p.).

However, even when Rebecca Solnit (2000) and Lauren Elkin (2016) have brought the female *flâneuse* to popular discourse very recently, literature on women wandering in the cities of the Two-Thirds World is not abundant. Elkin's women, for instance, walk in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London. Her sites of walking exist in Europe and North America, and when it is a context like Tokyo, she feels a discomfort from being unable to comprehend the spatial and cultural codes. 'I am trying to listen. To let it signify. What it signifies I can't understand', she writes (Elkin 2016, p. 167). While acknowledging these insights and critiques of the male-centred genealogies of walking, this essay, after Sharanya Murali (2017), attempts to decolonize walking by shifting the locale of the conversation from Europe and North America. I focus on the material, social and political architecture of the 'postcolonial body/city dialectic' (Murali 2017, p. 86) in the Two-Thirds World within the global South through an analysis of *Walk* and *Walk: South Africa*.

As *Walk: South Africa* takes on its own vivid life after Rao's *Walk*, I explore the resonances between notions of gender justice and gendered violence in the two performances. 'Based on the idea of the impossibility of a general theory' (p. 227),

writes De Sousa Santos, intercultural translation is also ‘interpolitical translation’. Unpacking the dialogue between the two performances as an attempt to break away from the grand, totalizing, hegemonic, homogeneous and reductive narratives of globalization, gendered violence as well as walking, I ask: How do we conceptualize the gendered ‘nature of risk’ while experiencing the urban public space in Delhi and Cape Town? What narratives of flânerie emerge when they are experienced and understood through embodied differences of race, class, gender, nation, age and sexuality in cities in the global South? I discuss how, *Walk: South Africa* as a ‘translation’ of *Walk*, offers a frame within which to imagine a transnational feminist politics of solidarity through the practice of performance, when the meanings and directions created by this endeavour are ‘precarious but concrete, short-range but radical, uncertain but shared’ (De Sousa Santos 2014, p. 234).

Walk (2012)

Shilpa Phadke et al (2011), while referring to Mumbai, discuss ‘loitering’ in the context of Indian cities and encourage women to take risks to experience pleasure on the streets. The authors point out the pejorative connotations of ‘loitering’: it is marked by masculine adjectives when translated in Hindi – *lukka, lafanga, vella, tapori, bekaar* – implying the pleasures of the public street space, neither admirable nor acceptable, are reserved for men only. The carefree abandon associated with crowding and chatting at street corners or boarding the night bus is discouraged for women because of the dangerous implications it has for their safety. But since there is no singular category of ‘woman’, as it is always experienced as intersecting with class, caste, ethnicity and sexuality, the question arises: what category of women need to be protected from the dangerous streets?

Phadke, in a later essay, notes that the women who are encouraged to take risks and seek pleasure are ‘inevitably middle class, usually Hindu upper caste, mostly heterosexual and always respectable women’ (Phadke 2013, p. 51). This limited sympathy towards the freedom and safety of middle class, upper caste women in metropolitan spaces overlooks the concerns of minority women who belong to different castes, religions and socio-economic backgrounds, and who inhabit public spaces in very different ways – either out of ‘compulsions of economics’ or due to dire infrastructural gaps like lack of toilets (Chatterjee 2011, p. 170). Sharanya Murali has also highlighted that ‘the neoliberal co-option of women’s visibility in public as inherently liberatory can be unproductive, as it casts one’s movements as accessible or even desirable to all’ (2016, p. 204).

Reflecting on the ‘realities of layered exclusions and multiple marginalisations’, Phadke writes that violence against women in public is located alongside ‘violence against the poor, Muslims, dalits, hawkers, sex workers and bar dancers’ (Phadke 2013, p. 52). Furthermore, the framing of ‘respectable women’ makes the un-respectable woman and the dangerous man, ‘usually lower class, mostly migrant, often unemployed and sometimes uncomfortably Muslim’, suspicious, and those whose presence makes public street spaces unsafe (Phadke 2013, p. 51). In the British documentary, *India’s daughter*, Mukesh Singh, one of the accused for Jyoti Singh’s gang rape, is shown to be unapologetic for his crime. Jyoti Singh, according to him, transgressed her boundaries by indulging in disrespectful behaviour – inhabiting the public street space with a man at night – and invited sexualized violence. His defence lawyer,

A.P. Singh, had similar views.⁴ The distressing event in December 2012 invited a public outcry and street demonstrations across different cities in India, asking for death penalty for the rapists. The publicity the Delhi gang-rape incident received through media helped put pressure on the government to take swift action and also brought in legal changes recommended by the Justice Verma Committee (Verma 2013).⁵ The court sentenced the rapists to death within a year of the complaint having been lodged (Bagria and Sinha 2017). The othering of lower class rapists and the death penalty given to them also highlighted the selective outrage of the middle class that is relentless in protecting its women from the ‘dangers’ of the street. The experience of public street spaces cannot be disembodied and will always depend on the body who traverses it. The practice and understanding of walking, therefore, needs to be contextualized by not just the city it is embedded in, but also the gender, class, caste, ability, age, sexuality, religion and ethnicity of the walking body, and it is fruitful to understand these in conjunction with each other.

The city is not one homogenous site either. The complex, varied and power-asymmetrical nature of the spaces that make up Delhi were forged through longstanding state-sanctioned inequalities and spatial segregation (Legg 2007). Women’s experiences in these spaces – Old Delhi, New Delhi, refugee colonies, resettlement colonies, ring towns, urban villages – produce different scripts of walking, as a result of caste, class, ethnicity, ability, sexuality and religion and the oppressions they generate. My own experience of walking in Delhi, therefore, continues to be determined by the nature of earth beneath my feet and the weight of the histories of violence these spaces carry. For instance, walking in New Delhi (ND), the capital of the independent India, with the symbolic markers of stately authority in the form of President’s House and the Parliament, differs from when I walk in Old Delhi (OD), once known as Shah-jahanabad, the erstwhile capital of the Mughal empire that now lies in ruins. In ND, marked by my upper caste, middle-class identity, I am in familiar surroundings. The roads are clean and wide with boulevards on either side, and I do not feel threatened. In OD, however, I am aware of being an outsider, and have to make efforts to fit in, through a deliberate choice of clothes and demeanour. Its streets and narrow alleyways are unfamiliar territory and I do not frequent the area after sunset. Loitering, then, as espoused by Phadke et al, is entangled in the spatial histories of the city – any city – and bears consequence on the radicality of walking as an act of asserting agency.

After struggling with her injuries in the hospital for twelve days, Jyoti Singh died on 28 December 2012 in a hospital in Singapore where she was shifted to by the government on 26 December on the pretext of providing better treatment although the move may have been politically motivated. As it became apparent to the medical authorities that the chances of her survival were grim, the government anticipated a furious outburst of anger by its citizens. Her shift to a different country may have been aimed at reducing the intensity of public outrage. This action on the part of the government was heavily criticized and mass demonstrations were held throughout the country to condemn it. Full of anger and resentment against the state, thousands of Delhi’s residents occupied the streets outside Jantar Mantar and India Gate, followed by protests all across the country to condemn the insensitivity and indifference of the government in handling the issue and to demand changes in law aimed at a larger transformation towards a gender sensitized society. A collective conversation around safety and mobility had begun to take place in public spaces.

The 65-year old veteran artist Maya Rao created and performed *Walk* at Jawaharlal Nehru University on 31 December 2012, as a response to the event of Singh's death as well as public anger at the way the government responded to it. *Walk* takes place on a bare stage as Rao walks, and talks to the audience, while a beautifully sombre piece of music by Sudhir Rikhari plays in the background. Rao's *Walk*, unlike flânerie, is not borne out of a curiosity for discovery or experiencing the city with wonder; it is more a form of 'informing, warning, cautioning' women (Rao 2019). Having participated in the passionate protests that went on outside the President's House for weeks, her inspiration came from the 'electric experience of having walked with young people during the march for justice' (Rao 2019). Even though the text of the performance has a predetermined structure, each performance is different as Rao makes spontaneous choices about the sequence of spoken words as well as the language they are spoken in, depending on the occasion of performance and composition of the audience. The performances have addressed the need for public security, the meaning of consent, the right to love and the intertwining of gendered and sexual identities with the city women live in. The discussions in the streets informed her text and performance and vice versa (Rao 2019).

Walk has been performed multiple times since its inception, addressing different issues of social and political significance: One Billion Rising campaign against gendered violence; protest against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code that criminalizes homosexuality; to show solidarity with students and staff at Jawaharlal Nehru University when the administration attempted to restrict free speech on campus; against the rising Right-wing fundamentalism; National Campaign for the People's Right to Information convention; among others. Rao first performed *Walk* in the university compound of JNU; on various occasions at Jantar Mantar, the designated protest space close to the Parliament House in the heart of Delhi; as well as various schools, colleges, living rooms and public spaces across India.

The performance I discuss here took place on 21 February 2013 at Jantar Mantar, as part of the Bekhauf Azaadi (Freedom without Fear) campaign that was organized to demand the implementation of Justice Verma Committee.⁶ In the performance, Rao is wearing a black sari with a red border, with the edge of the sari tucked in front at the waist. With her long white hair swaying along, Rao conjures up the imagery of Goddess Durga in her attire of brightly coloured red and black sari, the warrior Hindu goddess who fights the negative forces of evil. Her gait is unassailable and her voice strong and powerful. Like the text of *Walk* that has undergone adaptations depending on the nature of the event the site of performance and the political climate, so has her costume. For most of her other performances, Rao wore black tights, a T-shirt and sandals – as seen in the photographs – to acknowledge the hundreds of students who marched on the streets of Delhi in December 2012 (Figures 1 and 2).

Rao's use of deep voice and bold, expansive movements of arms and legs in *Walk* are reflective of her Kathakali training that has always been intrinsic to her solo performances. She emphasizes the need for women to occupy public spaces without fear, but recognizes that the process is not an easy one.

Walk.

One, Two ...

Can I? Will I? Shall I?

A step at a time.

Can I? Will I be able to do it?



Figure 1. Maya Rao during the performance of Walk at Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi. Photo by S. Thyagarajan.



Figure 2. Maya Rao during the performance of Walk at Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi. Photo by S. Thyagarajan.

I'll do it.⁷

The desire to wander the streets of Delhi after dark is stated very categorically.

Not 4, not 5, not 6, not 7,
At 12 midnight
I want to walk.
Walk the streets of Delhi.

She wants to inhabit public spaces without fear, rather than passing through them momentarily.

I want to walk on the streets
I want to sit on a bus
I want to lie on a park bunch
And I try not be afraid of the dark.

Pointing out the misogynist attitudes of the police and its lack of sensitivity towards survivors of harassment, Rao notes that, out of 635 cases of rape in 2012, only one man was convicted.

In 2012, 635 cases were registered
But only 1 man got convicted
Give me 634 convictions.

Just as her activist street theatre in the 1970s emphasized the need for legislative action to support grassroots feminist activism, Rao's *Walk* proposes that social debates need to be accompanied by legal assistance to underwrite a structural transformation.

Give me a law.
I don't want an ordinance.
I want it now, I want it today
To defeat everyone of those 634, I need a law.

The public spaces are marked by patriarchy, as the rape incident proved, but the family is not a safe space either. Pointing to the often ignored case of marital rape in hetero-patriarchal domestic spaces, Rao brings in the notion of consent.

A man who cannot sit next to a woman right
A man who cannot touch a woman right
A husband who cannot ask his wife before they have sex tonight.
I'll talk to you, don't talk to him.
I'll walk with you, don't walk with him.

She laments the state of law and order in Delhi, but that will not deter her from venturing out.

The police commissioner says 22,000 streets in Delhi are not lit

We'll hold our own lamp
We'll be our own light.

Highlighting the urgency of gender-sensitive laws, Rao insists:

Give me a cop
Who opens his book
And notes what I say correctly
And if I can't speak up immediately and I go home to take care of myself
Will the policeman write my complaint?

There is a recognition that the task at hand is tedious, and that it will require collective action.

There's a policeman at the end of this street on parliament street
It might be that we'll have to go there tonight
It might be that we take out the book and write it ourselves.
Don't walk with him, I'll walk with him.
Don't vote for him.

The repetition of mono-syllabic verbs like 'think', 'talk', 'say' and 'walk' are political performatives that call for breaking the silence around gendered violence. The audience is full of energy and watches with a rapt attention. She addresses the women in the audience (in Hindi), asking and encouraging them to break the silence over gender violence and claim public space. The mood around is intense and sombre. Standing, sitting, holding hands, nodding their heads and cheering loudly, the performance resonates with the audience very profoundly.

Since the election of the Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister in May 2014 and his re-election in May 2019, regressive campaigns like love jihad, anti-Romeo squad and beef-ban⁸ across North India have been prevalent, intensifying particularly since the appointment of a hardline Hindutva advocate Yogi Adityanath as the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh in March 2017. The increasing number of incidents of hooliganism by Akhil Bharatiya Vishwa Parishad, the student wing of the BJP party, in academic spaces to silence speech and discussion are a dangerous trend in Delhi where artistic freedom and public spaces are under threat. Instead of combating sexualized violence with structural and legal changes, the anxiety around it encourages regimes of surveillance and control of women's bodies and denial of their access to public spaces. *Walk* intervenes in this culture of restricted mobility for women and attempts to challenge the regulation of women's bodies and rights through a creative intervention.

Walk: South Africa (2013)

My introduction to my current city of residence, Cape Town, was not a pleasant one. Perhaps it was because I had seen multiple perfect shots of the sun-kissed table mountain, the sprawling vineyards and the penguin-filled beaches, the image of Cape Town I arrived with was that of a tourist utopia. Soon after I arrived, I enrolled myself in a photography course, hoping that learning a new skill would increase the probability

of finding friends, and, at the same time, would encourage me to explore interesting nooks and corners of the city. While I looked forward to experiencing and archiving the streets through my camera, little did I know that the public space was not open to such incursions unto itself. Soon I discovered that walking on the streets with a bulky camera was an invitation to theft, mugging and/or physical attacks, even during the broad daylight. Every time I wanted to do my field assignment, I had to ask a friend to accompany me. And even then, I could only go to streets that were swarmed with tourists, and had to make sure that I was back home before the close of the working day. After the shops close down, the streets become ‘dangerous’, when the middle class, white, black and coloured, returns home. Then the streets become available to the economically poor, primarily black men and women, who can earn their living by being in that space. How, then, was I – a middle-class, woman of colour, an Indian woman – supposed to *be* and *move* on the streets, if without company and purpose? In other words, what are the implications of *flânerie* in a post-apartheid city where the remnants of urban planning and spatial segregation continue to exclude certain bodies over others?

Walter Benjamin’s flâneur reads the city through wandering on the streets, partaking in its urban rhythms and experiencing multiple space–time continuums of the urban spectacle. But, writing in the context of South African cities, this ‘privileging the surface and visibility conceals the ubiquity of the urban form’, argue Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall (2004, p. 63). They ask to pay attention to ‘concealed or embedded other orders of visibility, other scripts that are not reducible to the built form, the house façade, or simply the metaphorical figure of the flâneur’ (p. 364). Writing about the landscape of apartheid in South Africa, Lindsay Remner points to the multiple forms of discrimination that are embedded in the country’s spatial codes.

Countless instruments of control and humiliation (racially discriminatory laws, administrative boards, commissions of inquiry, town planning schemes, health regulations, pass books, spot fines, location permits, police raids, removal vans, bulldozers) and sites of regulation and surveillance (registration offices, health clinics, post offices, recruitment bureaus, hostels, servant rooms, police cells, court rooms, park benches, beer halls) continue to affect people’s movement in city spaces (2005, p. 123).

Walking in post-apartheid cities continues to be experienced *through* these traces of apartheid and colonial histories.

In Cape Town, ‘the emblematic urban figure is the victim of forced removal’ (Murray et al 2007, p. 14), and not the flâneur, who functions as the ‘paradoxical cultural figure of African modernity’ (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004, p. 364). The Group Areas Act of 1950 implemented racial segregation by forcing black citizens to live in the ghettos on the edge of urban areas, in Bantustans or ‘townships’, and reserved the city centres, farms, beaches and mountains as white spaces. Two decades after the transition to democracy, the streets carry the burden of the past where the spaces occupied by the rich and poor, white and black people, men and women, tourists and citizens, play and struggle are always in tension with each other. Streets are defined by certain occurrences and ‘dangerous spots’, spaces where mugging, theft, murder, harassment, drug deals, sex work take place with a kind of intensity and regularity and the daily rhythms of residents follow a set of unwritten rules around them. Marked by

specific practices along racial lines, there are starkly visible differences between those who walk and those who do not. It is black kids and the black urban poor who are seen on the streets. Middle class citizens – black, white, coloured – do not walk (Nuttall 2004, p. 746). During my ten months in Cape Town, I have realized I experience the streets indirectly. It is either through a living room conversation or while driving through the city that my friends share fascinating anecdotes of oral history about street spaces. My experience of the public is mediated through window panes and burglar alarms.

The structural make-up of Cape Town lends itself to be characterized less by practices of flânerie and wandering than by oppression, surveillance, hostility, fear, hate, suspicion and threat towards certain kinds of bodies. When the streets serve little purpose other than being functional – and only just about – and are symbolized by constant paranoia, the desire for adventure and freedom through walking in the city, as held by the anarchic Situationists, exhibits limitations in the ways the walking art practice negotiates the legacy of colonialism where inequalities are scripted in the very fabric of the city. The demarcation of racial identities and spaces determines not just where one walks, what skin tone walks but also ‘how’ one walks to escape encounter with police brutality. In its depiction of sexualized violence and my interview with the performers, *Walk: South Africa* reveals the legacies of colonialism when colonial subjects attempt to defy years of subjugation and move through cities that were built on violence and oppression. When race and gender materially condition our experience of access to urban spaces and the ramifications of power in all its manifestations, the privileges that come with the colour and sexuality affect the nature and extent of the risk that can be undertaken for the sake of adventure.

Since it took shape, each performance of *Walk: South Africa* has taken a different form, depending on the individual choices made by the performers, availability or the lack of it of performers, and the particularities of the location and context of each performance. The most recent version was performed at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in June-July 2018, with seven women in the team: Koleka Putuma, Rehane Abrahams, Siphumeze Khundayi, Genna Gardini, Lukhanyiso Skosana, Nolufefe Ntshuntshe and Sara Matchett.⁹ Two of the performers are white, four women are black and one is of mixed race. At least four artists identify themselves as lesbians and one of them is trans. The age-range varies between early twenties to early fifties. The diversity of bodies, in terms of colour, age and sexuality in *Walk: South Africa*, speaks to a wide audience of the South African populace. The performance evokes the physical and mental aspects of trauma that survivors of sexualized violence go through without representing the act of rape directly. The stories that the artists tell through their bodies and voice are deeply personal, sharing and inviting vulnerability from their audience. Both *Walk* and *Walk: South Africa* make visible gendered violence in a diverse range of spaces, even though they originated as a response to sexualized violence in public street spaces.

The performance in Grahamstown was curated by Sara Matchett and Koleka Putuma, an acclaimed black poet and performer from South Africa. It took place in the Botanical Gardens where the individual vignettes were careful responses to the various sites that the garden offered: parking area, toilets, the wild outdoors, doorways. The audience members were led to walk between the various sites of the performances, prompted by a torch light and, sometimes, a cow bell. The entire sequence was choreographed with minimal light and sound, and the rustle of the

wind, the hushed up breaths and the rubbing of shoes against the grass could be heard quite distinctively alongside the haunting soundscape provided by Skosana's breathtakingly beautiful voice.

Sound and movement are used as performative devices that challenge the silencing of survivors that follows episodes of sexualized violence. The performance begins with representing a struggle: *to be*, as in to live, and *to be heard*, as in to not lose voice. In the first vignette, Rehane Abrahams is seen attempting to come out of a shallow mound, a grave as it were, hesitatingly saying 'no', repeatedly. 'It was a response to the many cases of women being buried after being brutally killed', Abrahams told me. This is the story of 'an ordinary woman, wearing sportswear, walking in a park' (Abrahams 2018). For the performance at the International Theatre Festival of Kerala in 2017, Abrahams, responding to Rao's *Walk* (2012), performed a vignette to show how the intersections of race and class manifest in the city. She represented the 'domestic workers in Cape Town, women carrying unwieldy bags, who walk great distances through high-rent, predominantly white neighbourhoods, traversing dangerous train and taxi spaces, to clean homes' (Abrahams 2018). She mentioned a neighbourhood by the sea, with semi identical Dutch colonial houses, where the only visible people in the area were uniformed domestic workers, their outfits reminiscent of colonial slaves or servants. She chose to examine the violence of this figure's 'walk' through Butoh dance and breath, in a colonial-inspired costume with a garbage bag mouth gag.

Back in Grahamstown, the audience is led, following the powerful voice of Lukhanyiso Skosana, to the next vignette. Wearing a white bridal dress, nails painted red, Skosana is sitting on a tree, singing from her gut (Figure 3). She leads us indoors, where the melodious singing continues but gradually becomes aggressive, interspersed



Figure 3. Lukhanyiso Skosana during the performance of *Walk South Africa* at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown in 2018. Photo by Mbaliyekethelo Sunflower Khumalo.

by loud tapping of the feet on the wooden floor. Abrahams can be seen in the same space, scared and murmuring indistinct sounds. Skosana gradually takes off her white dress, to reveal a traditional tribal dress underneath it, as the sounds reach a crescendo.

Wearing a long buttoned dress, Nolufefe Ntshuntshe attempts to put lipstick on her face but disfigures it. She then begins writing on the floor, and then on her legs and arms, as chants are played in the background. 'A woman must learn in quietness and full submission', she repeats frantically. Struggling to walk in her heels, Ntshuntshe leads us to the toilets, where Koleka Putuma is waiting. Wearing a white top and chequered boxers, covered in plastic from head to torso, she shouts 'speak' into a megaphone, as she walks out of the room, into the balcony overlooking the dark forest, and then to an amphitheatre. Putuma is the first performer who uses language to exhibit agency, and uses an instructional mode to engage with the audience. Her aesthetic of spoken-word poetry resonates with Maya Rao's *Walk* (2012) in that she refuses to be silenced and actively occupies space through language, sound and sheer physical movement.

Speak! Speak! Speak!
Ears splitting and vulgar
Vomit the gag, amputate the festering wound inflicted on you,
Wave your mouth frantic
In the dark, on the park, on the bus,
Scrape your way into the morning if you must
They have come to bury us,
Paraphrase us, diminish us,
Diminish us, deny us, confuse us,
Walk on us, walk *in* us!

As she disappears from sight, Ntshuntshe makes an entrance to the rhythm of hip hop music. She takes off her heels, changes into comfortable shoes, denim shorts and a shirt, puts on her backpack and makes an exit, all the while joyously moving to the sound of the music.

We are led to the space of the toilet again where we hear the sound of someone vomiting. Putuma appears from behind a closed door, only to go to the adjacent toilet. This time, the door does not open again. Instead, we see a stream of blood and soap on the floor, coming from inside to the space where the audience is standing. The torch highlights the concoction on the floor, as Skosana continues their singing in the background.

The performance shifts outdoors, into the cold darkness. Siphumeze Khundayi is on the ground, scared, as if struggling to free herself from someone trying to force himself on her. After repeated attempts, she manages to get up, but buries her head in a bucket of white paint. Her desperate attempt to 'cleanse' her body of the violence inflicted on it, as it were. In tears, she pulls out a long piece of cloth – folded in the shape of a penis – from her underpants, which she uses to gag and blindfold herself (Figure 4). Then she removes her dress and partly reveals her breasts. Khundayi represents the vulnerability, shaming and silencing of survivors, as well as the 'corrective rape' of black lesbian women.



Figure 4. Siphumeze Khundayi during the performance of *Walk South Africa* at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown in 2018. Photo by Mbaliyekethelo Sunflower Khumalo.

The last vignette is performed by Sara Matchett, who is seen sitting on her knees, wearing a pink shower robe, her profile to the audience. Her positioning in the space between a black iron metal door and a wooden door gives the feeling of entrapment (Figure 5). Her gaze is fiery and angry to begin with, and her voice melodic. This changes to a fearful and helpless look, until she lets out a shriek in agony, while her eyes turn red. White bodies are racially privileged but that does not protect them from gendered violence.



Figure 5. Sara Matchett during the performance of *Walk South Africa* at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown in 2018. Photo by Mbaliyekethelo Sunflower Khumalo.

The performance ends on an open-ended note, with the 14-year old Stembiso Sibanda covered with inflated plastic bags, and leading the audience out of the performance venue, into the world, each on her own. Ending the performance with the figure of the young performer was an intentional choice on the part of Matchett and Putuma as co-curators of the show (Matchett 2019). The performers and the spectators walk together in the forest, until each picks the path they want to use to move forward, in the festival as in life. The performance is not didactic – it does not provide solutions, but seeks a response nonetheless. The sheer physical movement of walking that the audience are made to undertake becomes a performative device that beckons them to take action against gendered violence.

Walking is a pause as well as a movement. If *flânerie* encourages letting-go of the mundane everyday life to seek out newness and freedom, walking in *Walk and Walk: South Africa* is about seeking a movement from stasis and forming collective solidarities to address gendered violence. Walking is a scream. It is not about looking out for a shock, but a desperate call for safety and familiarity that is free from dangerous encounters. Walking is conceived as a ‘mnemonic method of locating the experiences of the two women whose deaths influenced the development of the performance – Jyoti Singh and Anene Booyesen’, writes Nicosia Shakes (2017, p. 186). Using movement and sound as affective registers, *Walk and Walk: South Africa* attempt to address gendered violence through embodied activism.

Translating performance, building transnational solidarities

The Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung in 1955 paved the way for social and cultural communication across the borders of Asia and Africa. The translation of walking as

performance from one context in India to another in South Africa explores and mobilizes shared risks and interests in the Two-Thirds World, building horizontal connections outside of diplomatic meetings and the framework of the nation state. In the 'Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa', Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective lays out a blueprint for a '*collaborative* approach to the archive [that] requires working across the regional boundaries created by Area Studies' (2018, p. 179–180, italics in original). In that spirit, the focus on commonalities as well as differences, continuous exchange of work and ideas, collaborative writing and curating, between the artists and scholars in India and South Africa offers a rich body of archive that is not governed or determined by the academic structures of the 'Western academy [that] underrepresent[s] the voices of women and people of colour' (2018, p.177). The two performances of *Walk* are an act of coming together of artists and activists, in the hope of claiming and shaping space.

This event of translation-as-dialogue is untethered by neoliberal regimes of funding that are always unidirectional, flowing from Europe and North America to Asia, Africa and Latin America. The attempt at intercultural translation between India and South Africa is based on 'equal power relations', 'non-hierarchical communication' and 'reciprocal empowerment' as prerequisites (De Sousa Santos 2014, p. 214, p. 216). TMP's will to translate Rao's *Walk as Walk: South Africa*, connects feminist concerns and builds solidarities based on 'mutuality, co-responsibility, and common interests' (Mohanty 2013, p. 548). As live events, these performances operate as 'decolonial contact zones' where the artists imagine and practice a radical poetics and politics of 'mediation, confrontation, and negotiation' between themselves (De Sousa Santos 2014, pp. 226–227). The attempt at dialogue through translation seeks to establish 'thicker alliances' aimed at 'strengthening the struggles against capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy' (De Sousa Santos 2014, pp. 226–227).

'A transnational feminist practice', writes Mohanty, 'depends on building feminist solidarities across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on. In these very fragmented times it is both very difficult to build these alliances and also never more important to do so' (2013, p. 551). Sifting through the complex relationships between interconnecting actors, contexts, sites, standpoints and situatedness of performances, the attempt at translation seeks to reconceptualize the processes of circulation and knowledge-production across the Two-Thirds World. Even as the South African version took shape and form a few months after Rao's performance, *Walk: South Africa*, as a 'translated performance', does not search for equivalence to *Walk* – in either language, genre or dramaturgy – because the intention is not to override or assimilate the differences in contexts. Rather, the political thrust of TMP's performance can be understood using Walter Benjamin's idea of translation as afterlife, where the translation 'marks the stage of [the work's] ... continued life' (2002, p. 254). *Walk: South Africa* highlights the brutality of the ways in which the privileged white people and the marginalized black communities inhabit the public street spaces in South Africa. The political project of translation in performance is motivated by the intention of *carrying over* the embodied artistic histories and repertoires. The narratives of the two performances do not compete for 'originality'; rather, TMP talks back to Rao's *Walk* by actively representing multiplicities of experiences. If Rao's performance is representative of the concerns of urban men and women in Delhi, TMP brings to life the complex racist realities in South Africa that are experienced differently on the streets by different women, depending on their skin colour, ethnicity,

class, age, ability and language. The postcolonial condition of India and South Africa does not overlap, and the difference in timeline of the democratic transition of the two countries is just one significant reason for that. The colonial history of South Africa and the afterlives of slavery as an ongoing condition of black life forever loom in the background as the performers in *Walk: South Africa* represent the everyday and the ordinary gendered violence their bodies are subjected to. TMP's focus on feminist pedagogies translates in a performance aesthetic that is rooted in social justice, as it attempts solidarity and healing through theatrical collaboration.

The dramaturgical structure of *Walk: South Africa* embodies the idea of translation-as-dialogue – both with itself and transnationally with Rao's *Walk* – as the artists reflect on and represent their privileges or the lack of them. The translation initiated by TMP is a collective effort that is based on a conscious process of sharing and the vulnerabilities it produces. Given that the work of all the artists is rooted in a repertoire of feminist struggles, the desire to translate performance from one context in the Two-Thirds World to the other, together with the gendered affects it produces, is an 'imperative dictated by the need to broaden political articulation beyond the confines of a given locale or culture' (De Sousa Santos 2014, p. 214).

I have discussed how the performance of walking is embedded within and across the histories of colonialism in India and settler colonialism in South Africa. Translation between the two contexts as well as between scholarship and performance also raises critical questions about how decolonial imaginations and recalibrations might look like in practice. Translation in performance is also about detangling the various slippages of meanings when interpretation is carried over from one format to the other, from performance to a piece of writing. If we understand translation-as-dialogue as a mode of decolonization between the One-Thirds World and the Two-Thirds World within the global South, then a difficult conversation about implications of our own privileges or the lack of them – as upper class, upper caste, white, tenured track professors, precarious academics, students, black South Africans – is a crucial way forward. Perhaps it also begs an interrogation of the very concept and workings of the 'transnational', which affords representation and global mobility to certain bodies while excluding others. As the decolonial wave gathers momentum across the globe in the aftermath of the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, the role of caste in the Indian university spaces as well as in the transnational movement of ideas and people, demands an urgent interrogation. For a project of an embodied political imagination to be inclusive and intersectional, a negotiation the social and political complexities within the boundaries of the nation state are as relevant as transnational conversations with allies in the global South.

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2. The Apartheid-era Population Registration Act, 1950 codified the South African population based on their skin colour and ethnicity. According to the South African racial demographics, the population is divided into five ethnic groups: White South African, Black African, Coloured, Asian and Others. Coloured are a multiracial ethnic group with mixed ancestry.
3. Formed in 2000, The Mothertongue Project is an all-women collective of artists, activists, academics and practitioners committed to personal and social transformation through participatory theatre and integrated arts methodologies. Using expressive arts therapies, their work creates spaces for women and youth located at the margins to speak their stories and share their experiences in order to gain power and credence within their bodies and communities. Apart from Sara Matchett, the other co-founder is Rehane Abrahams, a South African actor, writer, director and theatre-maker from Cape Town.
4. A.P. Singh is quoted as saying,

If my daughter or sister engaged in pre-marital activities and disgraced herself and allowed herself to lose face and character by doing such things, I would most certainly take this sort of sister or daughter to my farmhouse, and in front of my entire family, I would put petrol on her and set her alight.

5. A three-member committee comprising Retired Justice J.S. Verma, Retired Justice Leila Seth and Solicitor General Gopal Subramaniam was constituted on 23 December 2012 to recommend amendments to criminal laws of India. The committee submitted its report on 23 January 2013, which included stalking, voyeurism, acid attacks and trafficking in the definition of sexual violence.
6. For reference, this is a clip of the performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkTyvOKUZ4E>.
7. The text is from Rao's performance on 21 February 2013. All translations from Hindi are my own.
8. *Love-jihad* is a campaign run by Hindu right-wing groups against what they say is a Muslim conspiracy to convert Hindu girls to Islam by feigning love. 'Anti-Romeo' squad was launched in March 2017 by the newly appointment Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh to 'protect' women from suspected youth who harassed them. The current ruling government has banned the consumption of beef owing to the sacredness of the cow in the history of Hinduism. Failure to abide by this law has led to lynching of Muslims by Hindu mobs and invites imprisonment of 5 years.
9. For reference, this is a clip from the performance that took place at the National Arts Festival 2018 in Grahamstown: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZJddahknJ0&t=48s>.

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