Performance Matters

Diaspora Walks: Small Lessons in Unlearning

Nazli Akhtari

Volume 7, numéro 1-2, 2021

Performing (in) Place: Moving on/with the Land

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085313ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1085313ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Institute for Performance Studies, Simon Fraser University

ISSN

2369-2537 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Akhtari, N. (2021). Diaspora Walks: Small Lessons in Unlearning. *Performance Matters*, *7*(1-2), 73–83. https://doi.org/10.7202/1085313ar

Résumé de l'article

This essay is a thought experiment that explores walking's potential in enacting recognition of Indigenous and territorial lands with the hope of rendering pedagogies of citizenship anew. More precisely, I ask whether walking can offer everyday lessons in unlearning Canada's settler colonial frameworks of citizenship. This essay, attempting to respond to the question, also hopes to add to conversations in diaspora studies and the ways diaspora performance studies can learn from Indigenous recognition and care of territorial lands as relations and Indigenous methodological interventions to unsettle colonialism. Using a feminist and critical Muslim studies positionality, I bring together research in performance studies, walking methodologies, and politics of diasporic subjects in order to explore how walking as an everyday and citational form might offer diaspora subjects affective ways to home in on a relational politics.

Diaspora Walks: Small Lessons in Unlearning

Nazli Akhtari

This is a walking/thinking exercise on the page. It began by a series of embodied walking provocations, individual and collective. It brings together my research in performance studies and my personal walking practice. I write about my walks within the context of Canada's settler colonial state, my institutional life, and politics of diasporic subjects as a first generation migrant woman, racialized brown and Muslim, who is complicit in settler colonialism on Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee lands and territories of Coast Salish peoples, Squamish, Stó:lō and Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam Nations. This essay queries walking's potential in enacting recognition through which I hope we can render pedagogies of citizenship anew. My walking on these pages strays away and returns, as a walker's mind always does (Solnit 2000, 134). I ask whether walking can offer everyday lessons in unlearning Canada's "pedagogies of citizenship and modalities of settlement" (El-Sherif 2019, 1) with the hope that this exercise adds to the conversations in diaspora studies and in ways we can continue learning from Indigenous recognition and care of territorial lands as relations and Indigenous methodological interventions in unsettling colonialism.

As scholars of performance studies, learning to unlearn calls us to task most urgently. The field from the outset has argued for an understanding of performance as a framework to examine "onto-historical formation of power and knowledge" (McKenzie 2001, 18). The decolonial approaches within the "anti-discipline" (Raznovich 2007, 8) of what we recognize as performance studies are predicated on the notion that performance renders visible the "contemporary formation of power and knowledge" (19). However, as Kānaka Maoli scholar Lani Teves reminds us, performance studies' imperialist impulses persist and not necessarily through the imposition of firm disciplinary frameworks, rather through knowledge extraction. Teves writes, "imperialism is not mostly about imposition; it is pre-eminently about extraction. Extraction leads to ownership and, in the wrong hands, slides into impersonation and appropriation" (2020, 253–54).

Indigenous artists and scholars, including Stó:lō scholar of Indigenous Arts Dylan Robinson, teach us about epistemological violence reinforced through extraction and consumption of Indigenous knowledges and cultures. Robinson, in turn, argues for "blockade" as a form of "structural refusal" and a key intervention that Indigenous artists use for disrupting the flow of Indigenous knowledge extraction and consumption (2020, 23). Thinking with Anishinaabe writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and public intellectual Naomi Klein, Robinson notes how the discussions of extractivism exceed the material world, more precisely that of the pipelines and natural resource development in First Nations territories across Canada. He echoes Klein in contending that "extraction isn't just about mining and drilling, it's a mindset—it's an approach to nature, to ideas, to people" (quoted in Robinson 2020, 14). Extraction as a mindset and approach undeniably permeates a range of methodological and theoretical approaches within academic fields concerned with postcolonial theory and antiracist scholarship. Indigenous interventionist approaches challenge and inspire those of us who grapple with extractive and other imperialist logics internalized by our communities and, in turn, have become conventions that undergird the performance and scholarship we produce

Nazli Akhtari is an assistant professor (CLTA) of English and Drama at the University of Toronto Mississauga.

about historically excluded cultures. There is potential for walking together here without claiming to walk the same way or the same road.

We need a relational politics in order to move away from normalizing extraction and consumption of historically excluded cultures, refuse to claim uncritical models of cultural identity, and undertake lessons in unlearning. To these ends, this essay picks up walking as a potentially inclusive and relational way of being in the world shared by human and nonhuman animals. I ask whether attentive forms of walking can offer diaspora subjects ways to move toward a relational politics, in particular for those of us racialized as Muslim who, as the Egyptian Canadian scholar of critical Muslim studies Lucy El-Sherif writes, often find ourselves "positioned as perpetual immigrants, compelled to exalt whiteness or be evicted" and "caught between an unresolved tension of settler spatial relations to nation and Indigenous spatial relations to Land" (El-Sherif 2019, 1). Such politics would ask that we develop forms of unbelonging to the settler colonial state, and instead learn from Indigenous nations' notions of land as relational and ongoing fights for sovereignty, also trusting in decades of intellectual, anticolonial, and antiracist work undertaken by Indigenous, Black, and feminist scholars and artists.

In putting forward this provocation about walking's potential, this essay remembers, with immense pain, Talat Afzaal, Madiha Salman, Yumna Salman, Salman Afzaal, and Fayez Afzaal, the family of five who believed in the healing power of gathering to walk and witnessing the sunset to combat the isolation and difficult conditions of living in a time of public health crisis. On one of their walks in London, Ontario, the family were attacked in an act of terrorism just because they were Muslims and walking. Only the youngest, Fayez, survived the Canadian white settler boy's attack on his family and faith on that Sunday afternoon of June 6, 2021. I must acknowledge that when I first began writing this essay and considering walking's potential, such an act of violence was simply unimaginable to me. The fact is, however, that Islamophobia is a multi-billion-dollar industry financed by colonial settler states. In the Indian American scholar and activist Deepa Kumar's words, "Empire creates the condition for anti-Muslim racism, and Islamophobia sustains empire" (2021, 7). It kills in all its incarnations of difference. Most notably, it soft-kills through representations that reduce the Muslim and brown body to "bare life," which Iranian socialist Zeinab Farokhi (building off Giorgio Agamben's concept of the "state of exception") posits normalizes dehumanization and criminalization of the Muslim body (2021, 16). Indeed, "walking is never neutral" (Springgay and Truman 2018, 14). In the past two decades, dominant media representations have rendered Muslim and brown bodies legible for ridicule, hate, maiming for fun, and killable. The magnitude of hate that surfaced in the attack on the Afzaal family speaks to the power of performance and media representation that seeps into the material world and takes life.

The timing of the act of terrorism in London, ON, which took place within a week from the discovery of the mass grave of 215 Indigenous children murdered in the Kamloops Indian Residential School, is crucial. This has spiked a many-nation conversation as more discoveries of unmarked graves follow. The world is also witness to a heightened moment within the ongoing struggles of Palestinian people against settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing. Since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, anti-Asian racism and hate crimes against people of colour have increased. The chain of violence and hate crimes attests that we need a coalitional and relational politics. This is not to overlook the particularities of each case's historical, cultural, and social contexts. Rather, we need a politics that acknowledges these differences as generative possibilities in order to get at the root of violence, which is always the same: white supremacy. From a walker's perspective then, in this time of global crisis—"emboldened White supremacy—it is crucial that we

cease celebrating the White male flâneur, who strolls leisurely through the city, as the quintessence of what it means to walk" (Springgay and Truman 2018, 14). Instead, as Springgay and Truman, the editors of *Walking Methodologies in a More-Than-Human World: WalkingLab*, invite us, "we must queer walking, destabilizing humanism's structuring of human and nonhuman, nature and culture" (14).

My provocations thereby rely more on a shared longing to belong in the form of cousin culture and queer kin making, in other words making kin beyond blood relations, relational formations that have always sustained racialized, historically marginalized, and underserved communities. Writing on Idle No More and the marginalization of negative affect, Robinson describes Indigenous scholars, artists, and activists as follows: "We are the twenty-first century's 'angry Indians'—cousins to the 'melancholic migrant' and 'feminist killjoy' in our unwillingness to let go of less-than-palatable cultural difference in order to participate as proper subjects of both the nation state and academic systems" (2017, 216). My walking/thinking in the following sections marks my unwillingness as that "melancholic migrant" and "feminist killjoy" cousin (Ahmed 2008). This piece, which takes on attentive walking as an everyday lesson in unlearning, is further a call for walking companions. I am inspired by Algerian curator and scholar of modern culture and media Arielle Aïsha Azoulay, who reminds us that taking part in "unlearning imperialism," we need to do so with companions, which "means no longer privileging the accounts of imperial agents, scholars included, and instead retrieving other modalities of sharing the world and the many refusals inherent in people's public performances, diverse claims, and repressed aspirations" (2019, 51). Walking as an everyday lesson in unlearning, and hopefully "unlearning with companions," allows us to retrieve an accessible and inclusive modality for sharing the world. It also holds a significant place in a wide range of social and political movements and across practices of refusal (51). This piece invests in walking exactly because its attentive forms have the potential to bridge the rifts between personal and social, mundane and extraordinary.

Diaspora Walks

Walking above all facilitates mobility. I take walking, broadly, to address movement across politicized spaces by people with diverse and versatile mobilities. Walking is not necessarily bipedal. It is a movement that, in all forms and enacted by bodies, encapsulates time, space, and embodiment. This compels considering whether agentic and attentive forms of walking could offer counter-practices to forced mobilities which are central to understanding diaspora. In my engagement with diaspora studies, I seek out an ontology of diasporic conditions that, above all other things, has to do with material and affective conditions of politically controlled time and space, and more precisely, modern capitalism's political management of time, which feminist media scholar Sarah Sharma conceptualizes as its *power chronography* (Sharma 2014). My understanding of diaspora experience is also informed by cultural studies and Black diaspora studies scholars, including Stuart Hall and Rinaldo Walcott. In its broadest sense, diaspora is mobility violently enforced by modern capitalism's spatial-racial ordering (Ogden 2018, 78). In turn, Western imperial diasporic histories are unfolding narratives of (traumatic) movement beginning in 1492.

Diaspora studies has yet to engage seriously with Indigenous decolonization and that of land more precisely. Mi'kmaw scholar of Indigenous studies Bonita Lawrence and feminist postcolonial scholar Enakshi Dua, for instance, expose how wrong it is that antiracism on Indigenous territories often "does not begin with, and reflect the totality of Native people's lived experience—that is, with the genocide that established and maintains all of the settler states within the Americas" (2005, 121).

Dua's approach to decolonizing antiracism is examining one's complicity in the ongoing project of colonization, namely the ways in which "the bodies of knowledge" that one has "worked to build have been framed so as to contribute to the active colonization of Aboriginal peoples" (2005, 122–3). Lawrence and Dua's call is taken seriously by Walcott, who asks diaspora studies to consider transatlantic slavery together with Indigenous colonization "as a cultural revolution that is still unfolding in ways that remain deeply traumatic but that are now also complicatedly implicating and entangling" (2020, 347).

Walcott addresses Black diaspora studies, in particular. I propose that his call, in conversation with Lawrence and Dua's earlier work, should be extended to diaspora studies more broadly and its engagements with the diversity of regional, ethnic, religious, and racial contexts in needing a more in-depth and reflective engagement with the legacies of colonial modernity and geopolitical economy of the past five hundred years. My current research[1] recognizes that my field of Iranian diaspora studies, for instance, stubbornly remains focused on what I would call "politics of departure" instead of what Walcott terms "ethics of arrival" as "making life in a place where the ethics of arrival can be fashioned through the brutal thefts of Euro-Western dominance and Indigenous claims to restore their stewardship of the lands" (2020, 353). I define "politics of departure" as explicitly concerned with anthropocentric subject positionings that are always already bound to imperialist and nationalist affects and the reasons that underlie departures from one nation-state to another. While there are specific histories and strong reasons that justify the emphasis on the histories, politics, and embodied valences that underlie departure from one's ancestral homelands, a shift becomes necessary to most sub-fields within diaspora studies not to fully abandon "politics of departure" but rather to approach it also in relation to "ethics of arrival." This is a crucial consideration for our engagements with diaspora because, as Walcott notes, "the ideas birthed in the context of the Atlantic world have been central to the ways in which European coloniality spread its global reach and thus the ways in which many other diasporas have come into being" (2020, 348). In engaging with diaspora, we must also note that the racial capitalism of the last five hundred years and European dominance on hegemonic global thought have been, in the first place, instigated through transatlantic slavery and the brutal theft of Indigenous territories (Walcott 2020, 347). As such, a relational politics above all demands reflection on and accountability for one's "ethics of arrival" on Turtle Island, recognizing these unfolding and entangled colonial legacies.

Diaspora walks that I propose here are those walks that move us with awareness of modern capitalism's legacies and those that move us in ways such that we ask ourselves about our "ethics of arrival." Walcott rightfully reminds us not all movements should be categorized as diasporic, noting that "diaspora cannot be adequately deployed as a term that means all kinds of movement across borders as has partly become evident in much scholarship and institutional posturing today" (2020, 346). I precisely call these diaspora walks to highlight histories and their significant implications for our current engagements with place and movement on stolen lands. My provocations are concerned with my personal "ethics of arrival" and call to companions to walk with me, historically conscious of the geopolitical economy that underlies diaspora's history of violence enacted through ongoing displacement, dispossession, and genocide. I respond to Walcott's note that, in its inclusivity and within its "conceptual and political range," the term "diaspora" can camouflage connections and contexts for the materiality it attempts to encapsulate. He argues that "the disappearance of Indigenous peoples from the diaspora conversation" is a case in point (Walcott 2020, 347).

Diaspora walks are inspired by Walcott, Lawrence, and Dua and, as part of this special issue on *Performing (in) Place: Moving on the Land,* hope to bring the recognition of Indigenous and ancestral

lands into diaspora conversation. The diasporic relationality I propose here uses walking as a strategy to move, not necessarily socially with others, but instead collectively and being accountable in the sometimes invisibilized presence of others (Springgay and Truman 2018, 11). It takes the feminist geographer Juanita Sundberg's "walking-with" framework that entails "serious engagement with Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies" because "walking enacts situated and contingent ontologies between land, peoples, and nonhuman others" (2014, 40). This inspires exploring the potential in agentic and attentive forms of walking as counter-practices to enforced mobility. My interest in walking also extends into rehearsing affective possibilities of phrases such as walking backward, walking out, and walking off as working metaphors to further home in on a relational politics.

Walking Backward

In 2017 and 2018, I practised two walking backward exercises at academic conferences. The first time we were a group of scholars in the *Digital Defence for Artists and Scholars* working group convened by performance and digital media scholars Jennifer Parker-Starbuck and Kalle Westerling at the American Society for Theatre Research. We gathered in a small meeting room at a Hyatt hotel in Buckhead located in Standing Peachtree on the territories of the Muscogee and Cherokee nations of Georgia. This walking iteration was a gesture of critique of techno-optimism. The second time, my walking exercise responded to the five-year engagement of a CATR *Walking Our Way Here* seminar convened by Algonquin Anishinaabe-kwe scholar of Indigenous performance Jenn Cole and Canadian settler scholars of performance and culture Natalie Rewa and Keren Zaiontz. We gathered on Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory where Queen's University is situated. This time, I invited participants to walk backward for five minutes, followed by fifteen minutes of journaling. The seminar focused on forms of reflection and action in recognition of our relationships to the ancestral lands and territories we arrive at as CATR participants. These two walking provocations responded to radically different scholarly discussions and were mostly informed by my background in theatre practice and my interest in exploring embodied knowledge as scholarship. I was committed to working within the notion that walking is the simplest yet most compelling art form. As a practitioner of contemporary performance and audience of dance and visual art, some of the best works I had seen consisted of walking iterations from the expansive repertoire of human and nonhuman animal walks. These include Mona Hatoum's 1985 performance *Roadworks* (see Perrot 2016), *The Green Line* (2004) by Francis Alÿs, Kubra Khademi's *Armor* and *Eternal Trial* from 2015 and *Kubra et les bonhommes piétons* from 2016 (Khademi 2016a, 2016b, 2016c), and Janet Cardiff's *Walks* beginning in 1992 and ongoing (Cardiff and Miller 2021) among many others).

I imagined walking backward more precisely as an exercise alongside other post-digital, durational, and meditative practices that task us to simply inhabit our bodies. In a time when our digital footprints are assembled into large bodies of data, sold in a fraction of a second, mined for patterns, and have turned into major extraction sites, I imagined this exercise would help open up the conversation to include parts of our identities, collective memories, and geographical histories that are often erased or lost in the blur. Several questions propelled my interest in "backward" as an allegorical term and a form of movement: how do we engage walking backward on physical, literal, and metaphorical levels? How does performing walking backward recharge our experience of temporality? How can we position forward within backward (how come one can walk backward yet move forward)? How do backward impulses limn our desire and struggle for "progress" when the ethnonational myth situates its progressive politics always already against the "backward" other and

through her worldlessness[2] and nonpersonhood? In hindsight, my interest in "backward" was also informed by my diasporic desire to rewind, remember, reenact, reclaim the past, my own history. I hoped for my walking backward undertakings to help me restore the sense of balance I had lost as I moved through spaces and histories with discomfort, hoping for a sense of spatial and temporal orientation. My walking backward exercises responded to the fractured experience of time and space in diaspora.

Walking Our Way Here

The *Walking Our Way Here* seminar at CATR continued to stay close to my work precisely because of the emphasis that the group discussion put on space and movement in academic spaces and in finding a renewed focus and reflection as we move on Indigenous territorial and ancestral lands. Space and movement are equally germane to studying diasporic and minoritarian performance cultures. It is not hard to conclude that historically there have not been enough spaces in Canadian academic institutions for work on diasporic cultures. The more generous advice given is often "you have to make your own spaces" or "build your own table." These common analogies acknowledge that success and social mobility depend on access and proximity to spaces of whiteness and knowing how to move within and around them. Common advice encourages and "advocates" making space alongside spaces of whiteness. However, it overlooks the material conditions of racial capitalism, thereby reallocating the labour of building, making, and starting out on the shoulder of already marginalized and racialized students, educators, and practitioners. Queer working-class multidisciplinary artist Shaista Latif reflects on "the table analogy" that resulted in a conversation in the community workshop, *How I Learned to Serve Tea*, that Latif hosted at a curated festival in February 2020 in Tkaronto. Latif writes: "And how can one build a table when you don't even have the material conditions for you to be able to buy supplies to construct a table. Also this fucking table analogy needs to end because we know who gets to be at the table" (Latif 2020). Latif's reflection is informed by long-term advocacy work and commitment to calling out and taking issue with the theatre community in Tkaronto and creative industries nationally that exploit identity politics, detaching it from class politics and using representation as a quick fix, a solution to remedy institutional racism.

Among other things, Latif is concerned with the real material and labour conditions that the table analogy performs. The table analogy and similar phrasings such as "make your own space" perform further harm on epistemological levels that often go unnoticed and unrecognized. Feminist philosopher Miranda Fricker conceptualizes such harm under the ethical concept of *epistemic injustice*, broadly defined as "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (Fricker 2007, 1). Fricker's book *Epistemic Injustice* illuminates "ethical aspects of two of our most basic everyday epistemic practices: conveying knowledge to others by telling them, and making sense of our own social experiences" (2). Fricker characterizes two forms of epistemic injustice: "testimonial injustice, in which someone is wronged in their capacity as a giver of knowledge; and hermeneutical injustice, in which someone is wronged in their capacity as a subject of social understanding" (8). She argues that "concentrating on the normality of injustice" can help us to gain so much philosophically about our epistemic conduct (8). Testimonial injustice is an everyday reality for those of us rendered "off-white" against the constant hovering of whiteness, and for those of us whose displacements and linguistic dispossessions are marked by off-key tones and accented voices. Regardless of diverse positionalities, those of us working in the academy are the subjects of knowledge in the broader ethical sense that Fricker theorizes, and it happens that we also career in

the knowledge business. Therefore, we are much more privy to individual and collective forms of epistemic conduct that might reinforce various forms of violence and harm.

Hermeneutical injustice is harder to locate and to call out. To put it in practice, French-Congolese radical/critical psychologist, Guilaine Kinouani, builds on the concept of epistemic injustice to offer the notion of "epistemic homelessness" for trauma-informed work to especially help racialized womxn. Kinouani defines "epistemic homelessness" as losing anchor in one's epistemic confidence and truth base. Put simply, epistemic homelessness refers to the condition of not knowing what you don't know (Kinouani 2017). The table analogy and "make your own space" rearticulate the neoliberal tropes that celebrate social entrepreneurship and privatization of labour built on resource extraction along with the exploitation of people of colour, dispossession, and displacement of Black people and genocide of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, these analogies perform a doubling of harm, at once erasing the material and labour conditions that are involved in building/making and effacing the epistemological confidence and ontological security required for moving/walking within spaces of whiteness and sitting around the table "with manners."

Homelessness expressed here, often linked to forced material homelessness by racist capitalist extraction and misallocation of resources, is an ontological symptom of the postcolonial condition or an effect of what Stuart Hall called the "traumatic character of the colonial experience" (1990, 225). On an epistemological level, homelessness becomes germane to the trauma of institutional life that most racialized and historically excluded folx experience. I remain cautious here that conceptualizing homelessness from an ontological or epistemological vantage point might amount to using it as a metaphor that overlooks the material conditions of the unhoused. I rather consider the violence at work in both epistemological and material injustice to be of the same kind, so much so that material homelessness comes after epistemological injustice has taken its toll. The unhoused is first violated in her capacity as a knower. This is somewhat different from the sense of homelessness as the broader metaphor of the postcolonial epoch or, in Iranian social anthropologist Shahram Khosravi's words, as "a paradigm, as a way of being in the world, as a lifestyle, as ethical and aesthetic normativity [that] opens the door to accepting the other as she *is*, not as how we want her to be" (2010, 95–96). Home is that territory, the thing, or the person, within and through which we embody our imagination using cultural affects and materials we associate with a sense of being home. And the sheer act of imagining, we often forget, demands a degree of epistemic confidence and ontological security, which is being violently stripped away from so many of us in our everyday as well as institutional lives. To embody diasporic experiences and make home on Indigenous lands invites a reterritorialization of our imaginations. Territory, we know, is much more than an analogy here. Emplacement on Indigenous Lands already walks the unknown and coming to know along ethical, material, and epistemic dimensions.

On a personal level, walking as an everyday practice has helped me throughout the years with the discomfort of navigating my lack of epistemic confidence and my ontological insecurity.

Walking Out/Off

The work of the *Walking Our Way Here* seminar resonated with me on a pedagogical level, too, because as much as they contribute to "formalization, bureaucratization, and rote presentation" of land acknowledgement" (Robinson 2019, 22), performance spaces and theatre institutions across Turtle Island have been central to my understanding of Canada's past. The land acknowledgments

that the front house managers read before shows I have attended throughout the years served as the first pedagogical contact that taught me that violence and irreconcilable harm had happened before I arrived. At the time of my landing in 2009, the histories about settler colonialism, theft of Indigenous lands, and the ongoing dispossession and genocide of Indigenous peoples accessible to new migrants were limited to mainstream media and a few pages in the citizenship guide for newcomers, namely *Discover Canada: Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*. Some immigrants have language barriers that hinder their access to a more informed range of social knowledges and services, and some, who have finally made it to Canada after hard voyages and escaping their excruciating pasts, might adopt denial as a survival strategy in order to be able to make life here on stolen lands. It is also important to note that, as a guide that everyone who applies to become a citizen must study, *Discover Canada* renders perfectly manifest what Walcott calls Canada's "white lies" spotlighting the multicultural one (2019, 394–96). Walcott calls "multiculturalism a lie because it continually keeps in place the idea that Canada is a white nation, with all the not-white others constituting its 'colored' adjunct citizenry." To accept that "multiculturalism is a successful policy," Walcott posits, is also acceptance of "the lie that whiteness in the Canadian state has decentered itself" (396).

Once I had spent enough time within Canada's borders to become a citizen, Bill C-24 was already in the House of Commons. I had learned about residential schools, missing and murdered Indigenous women, the Chinese Head Tax, and the internment of Japanese Canadians under the War Measures Act. The Trans-Mountain pipeline protests were happening across the lower mainland and northern BC. On the day I went through the citizenship ceremony, the judge read a long welcome speech congratulating us on becoming citizens of the best nation-state in the world, on escaping poverty, war, and our terrible pasts. She then shook hands with each person. At my turn, she commented on my looks and told me how lucky I was to be a Canadian. I was scared, ashamed, and appalled. I wished she would look me in the eye and say that with this package comes an unforgivable debt. I wanted her to tell the room that our pasts and presents just got more troubled. Instead, the judge's words echoed what one would see in "Explore Canada—the best of the best," Canada's promotional videos that reperform its extraction project with frames moving through glassy cosmopolitan cityscapes, children of empire, panning across raw natural landscapes of mountains, oceans, forests, and icebergs with no histories, territories, peoples, or extinct species in between. It felt like such a relief to *walk out* of the building. It feels like such a relief to *walk off* the lies they feed us. I sense a similar relief every time I *walk out* of the unrepairable relationships of circles and spaces unwilling to work at reconciliation. It feels good to claim a right to opacity and to refuse to believe in "white lies" or give in to whiteness's entitlement to knowing everything about everything.

Networking Walks

Walking works through affects and with effects. In its many variations, walking imperfectly quilts personal and political. It has always mobilized social and political movements. Walking, like diaspora, has an unfolding history. Anger has always found solace in walking. Feminist killjoys march. Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman remind us that "As a research methodology walking has a diverse and extensive history in the social sciences and humanities, underscoring its value for conducting research that is situated, relational, and material" (2018, 14). My walking/thinking propositions are not novel; rather, this proposal for walking as lessons in unlearning is informed by decades of anticolonial, antiracist, and feminist work. Attentive walking as an embodied reenactment and through metaphorical renderings breaks down unlearning's project

into small lessons. It gives us opportunities to develop a relational politics to unsettle the techno-neoliberal and racial capitalist context of Turtle Island.

As a personal experience, walking's affective potential rests precisely on its everydayness and citational form that evokes "ordinary affects," in Kathleen Stewart's words, making us aware of the affective dimensions of everyday life (Stewart 2007) and that which animates ordinary and everyday assemblages with the power and intensity to change us and to be changed by us. Walking always already comes along with my body no matter what place, how far from my ancestral lands, and how long after my ancestors I walk. As such, walking belongs to an ancestral repertoire. My body is at once "the archive and the repertoire" (Taylor 2003) of all my ancestors' walks. I walk not exactly but nearly like my mother does, and she walks just like her mother did, her mother just like hers. My yet-to-be-born children would step forward into the world one day and walk just like I do. And it is precisely my walking that has been recording my origins, the story of my displacement, and the history of my tomorrow. When my body is the archive, my "walking as 'anarchiving' attends to the undocumented, affective, and fragmented compositions that tell stories about a past that is not the past but is the present and an imagined future" (Springgay and Truman 2018, 14). At the same time, ancestral migrations and movements Indigenous to Turtle Island already walk here. Walking allows us to engage in cross-temporal kinship. Awareness of potential relationality between ancestors in the midst of my embodied practice reconstitutes my kinetic, ontological, and epistemological landscape. Walking as such disrupts "dominant narratives of place and futurity, remapping Land and 'returning it to the landless'" (14). Our ancestors walk together, differently.

As an exercise in unlearning, this piece first and foremost searches for radical possibilities that walking, in movement and thought, can offer me as a settler in deepening my recognition of the ancestral lands and territories I inhabit on a daily basis. My personal account of attentive walking seeks everyday lessons in unlearning "Canada's pedagogies of citizenship and modalities of settlement" (El-Sherif 2019). Furthermore, as a collective exercise in "walking-with" and "unlearning with companions," walking allows for building a network. This network of walks could consist of what feminist sociologist of Muslim Canada Jasmin Zine calls "small acts of subversion" (Zine 2008, 56) or the Iranian American sociologist of the Middle East Asef Bayat categorizes as "social non-movements," broadly defined as "the collective action of dispersed and unorganized actors" (Bayat 2013). Some examples of small acts of subversion and social nonmovements we can learn to unlearn from are people who live in poverty and unhoused people who claim rights to urban spaces and amenities, or youth who perform their identities and youthfulness through their desired lifestyles. This is not to romanticize experiences of poverty, homelessness, or class struggle. Rather, we might learn from and with consenting marginalized companions how to expose the violence of racial capitalism and how to refuse to abide by its spatial regulations that might ask us to stay or evacuate.

Put differently, this is to refuse to give up on ambling and loitering or to only pass through or walk with passion and direction. Robinson's invocation of the blockade invites us to disrupt movement as usual. We can learn to un-map the cartographies imposed by settler colonial states and racial capitalism by inhabiting differently. For instance, unemployed youth's powerful claim to public spaces in many regional contexts, including the place of my upbringing, Iran, is the underlying reason why young folks are criminalized just for being youth and loitering in public spaces. In the same regional contexts, youth historically have been drivers of cultural, social, and political change, which attests to the political power of "small acts of subversion" and "social non-movements." Unpacking "social non-movements," Bayat argues that "these claim-making practices are made and realized mostly through direct actions, rather than through exerting pressure on to authorities to

concede—something that the conventionally-organized social movements (like labor or environment movements) usually do" (Bayat 2013). In a sense then, a network consisting of attentive walks can similarly emerge as an "un-articulated strategy to reduce the cost of mobilization under the repressive conditions" (Bayat 2013) of our institutional lives and as subjects to the nation state's biopower and modern capitalism's power chronography. This dispersed yet attentive network of walks that recognize the histories of place while questioning the legitimacy of capitalism's power chronography and its public choreographies is the constellation of various lessons in unlearning that I call diaspora walks.

While the thinking I am able to call home and the epistemological grounds I navigate as a scholar member of the Iranian diaspora is not guaranteed to align with anticolonial practices, aligning walking and thinking in place on Indigenous lands extends my capacities for kinship with those involved in decolonization. The network of those thinking about the powerful capacities for walking, ambling, marching, loitering, mobilizing, and inhabiting otherwise is strong. As I walk with new awareness, walk out, walk off, I enter into an experience of territory that is more relational.

Notes

1. My discussions on notions of diaspora, politics of departure, and "ethics of arrival" in this section appear in my dissertation, *Diasporic Constellations: Performing on the Periphery of the Archives*, 2021.

2. Hannah Arendt coined the term worldlessness, which is "often used to describe the state of people who were left with no world to dwell in" (Azoulay 2019, 58).

References

Ahmed, Sara. 2008. "Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness." *New Formations* 63 (63): 121–37.

Alÿs, Francis. 2004. *The Green Line*. http://francisalys.com/the-green-line/.

Azoulay, Ariella Aïsha. 2019. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. London: Verso.

Bayat, Asef. 2013. "The Urban Subalterns and the Non-Movements of the Arab Uprisings: An Interview with Asef Bayat." Interview by Nada Ghandour-Demiri. *Jadaliyya*, March 26, 2013. https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/28301.

Cardiff, Janet, and George Bures Miller. 2021. *Walks*. https://cardiffmiller.com/walks/.

El-Sherif, Lucy. 2019. "Webs of Relationships: Pedagogies of Citizenship and Modalities of Settlement for 'Muslims' in Canada." *Lateral: Journal of the Cultural Studies Association* 8 (2). https://csalateral.org/issue/8-2/webs-of-relationships-pedagogies-citizenship-muslims-canada-el-sherif/.

Farokhi, Zeinab. 2021. "Cyber Homo Sacer: A Critical Analysis of Cyber Islamophobia in the Wake of the Muslim Ban." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 6 (1): 14–32. https://doi.org/10.13169/islastudj.6.1.0014.

Fricker, Miranda. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hall, Stuart. 1990. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora Identity." In *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, 222–37. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Khademi, Kubra. 2016a. "Armor." YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXuNtZPMDvQ.

———. 2016b. "Eternal Trial." YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhtGNB17h1Q.
———. 2016c. "Kubra et les bonhommes piétons." YouTube video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=by-ACEf8BOs.
Khosravi, Shahram. 2010. *"Illegal" Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Kinouani, Guilaine. 2017. *Epistemic Homelessness: "Feeling Like a Stranger in a Familiar Land with no Anchor and No Support."* https://vimeo.com/340874373.
Kumar, Deepa. 2021. *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire: Twenty Years after 9/11*. London: Verso.
Latif, Shaista. 2020. Facebook, November 25, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/shaista.latif.
Lawrence, Bonita, and Enakshi Dua. 2005. "Decolonizing Antiracism." *Social Justice* 32 (4): 120–43.
McKenzie, Jon. 2001. *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. New York: Routledge.
Ogden, Laura A. 2018. "The Beaver Diaspora: A Thought Experiment." *Environmental Humanities* 10 (1): 63–85. https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-4385471.
Perrot, Capucine. 2016. "Mona Hatoum, Performance Still 1985–95" in *Performance at Tate: Into the Space of Art*. Tate Research Publication. https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/performance-at-tate/perspectives/mona-hatoum.
Raznovich, Diana, Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba, Kusuhara Tomoko, Takahashi Yuichiro, William Huizhu Sun, Diana Taylor, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña. 2007. "TDR Comment: Is Performance Studies Imperialist? Part 3: A Forum." *TDR: The Drama Review* 51 (4): 7–23.
Robinson, Dylan. 2017. "Enchantment's Irreconcilable Connection: Listening to Anger, Being Idle No More." In *Performance Studies in Canada*, edited by Marlis Schweitzer and Laura Levin, 211–35. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
———. 2019. "Rethinking the Practice and Performance of Indigenous Land Acknowledgement." *Canadian Theatre Review* 177:20–30. https://doi.org/10.3138/ctr.177.004.
———. 2020. *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Sharma, Sarah. 2014. *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Solnit, Rebecca. 2000. *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. New York: Penguin Books.
Springgay, Stephanie, and Sarah E. Truman. 2018. *Walking Methodologies in a More-Than-Human World: WalkingLab*. London: Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315231914.
Stewart, Kathleen. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Sundberg, Juanita. 2014. "Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies." *Cultural Geographies* 21 (1): 33–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474013486067.
Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Teves, Stephanie Nohelani. 2020. "The Theorist and the Theorized: Indigenous Critiques of Performance Studies." In *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Historiography*, edited by Tracy C. Davis and Peter W. Marks, 249–59. London: Routledge.
Walcott, Rinaldo. 2019. "The End of Diversity." *Public Culture* 31 (2): 393–408.
———. 2020. "Diaspora, Transnationalism, and the Decolonial Project." In *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism*, edited by Jenell Navarro, Andrea Smith, and Tiffany Lethabo King, 343–61. Durham: Duke University Press.
Zine, Jasmin. 2008. "Honour and Identity: An Ethnographic Account of Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School." *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 19 (35): 35–61.