

nance between poetry and is he recreates Perses's epic from Beijing to Ulaan Bator. Combined with this are Merrill's sharp observations on China's push towards war at any price, wise reflections on the Persian produced ethereally, poetry grounded in the of colonialist politics and ons of haunting beauty on the f China and Mongolia, where es obvious that Merrill himself of no small stature.

Third of the linked essays, 'War', journeys to the Middle East in what travels in the key of terror'. Unlike sections, Merrill finds little in the idance as he comes to the a tumultuous time — just after f the American war in Iraq, while vairs are still resonating in and Palestine, and others are o brew in Syria and beyond. ovides splendid reference to the and other teachings of Christ as pts to navigate the area using his tuality as a compass. And he ses it all as he wanders into a war ebanon: stopped by soldiers, he to bare his body and soul to i sincerity and his non-terrorist ils. This maze-like essay reveals essness to make sense of the ut he refuses to throw his hands pair. Instead he offers them nd symbolically to other poets, nd seekers in the attempt to d the destructive tendencies in e.

ences to eastern and western philosophy, religion, the Torah, the Bible, the Upanishads, the s of Buddha rest in delicate throughout the narratives. eaves a dazzling tapestry of ge for the reader. Like the hair tapestries of China, he ses precious strands from his as offerings of his own struggle edge and understanding. never afraid to show the limits rming, his weaknesses and lities, his failures. He equates s path for eloquence with the it's quest for God, although he s so implicitly. In this way, *The Doves* is an education both

spiritual and literary, a book to struggle with and to enjoy.

Shiva Rahbaran

## The Walking

Laleh Khadivi

Bloomsbury Circus, London, 2013, pb  
259pp ISBN 1 4088 1484 0 £12.99  
www.bloomsburycircus.com

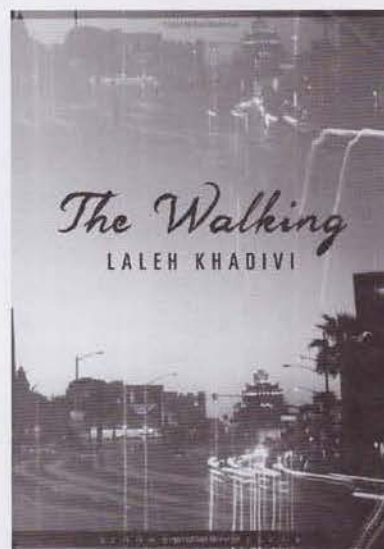
Laleh Khadivi's new novel *The Walking* is a poignant portrayal of exodus and exile, a typical Iranian fate after the 1979 Islamic revolution. The novel tells the story of two young Kurdish brothers who, having been forced to take part in a massacre in order to show their loyalty to the new Mullah regime, flee post-revolutionary Iran on the spur of the moment.

The brothers, Ali and Saladin, could not be more different. Ali, the older of the two and the initiator of the spontaneous escape, is haunted by memories of the massacre and by feelings of guilt at having betrayed the Kurdish cause and choosing to save his life instead of sacrificing it for his people. For the younger Saladin, the flight is an adventure. Having been brought up as a cinema addict by their mother — whose dreams of living in a modern city (if not Los Angeles, at least Tehran) die early with her — Saladin sees the flight as an exciting journey towards Hollywood, free life and free love. In the course of their escape from Iranian Kurdistan, which is described through very vivid, convincing imagery, he feels only inches away from the kind of silver-screen dream that had sustained him in his provincial hometown.

The dream-like style of the narration fits the novel well. From an epic, historical point of view *The Walking* could be the story of Homo sapiens who for thousands of years walked the earth facing myriad dangers in the quest for survival. In a more modern context, *The Walking* is the story of the brutal awakening of a nation from the unfulfilled dream of reclaiming its long-lost grandeur and prosperity.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century and particularly under the Pahlavi Shahs (1926–1979), Iran had been a nation that dreamed of belonging to the modern world and modelled itself

on Western democracies accordingly. When the revolution erupted in 1979 and the *Velayat-e Faqih* [the clergy] seized virtually all the political power, Iran descended into a nightmare as millions were forced into exile. Laleh Khadivi writes about this experience from the 'inside'; as an extremely pro-US country turned into the West's arch-enemy overnight under Ayatollah Khomeini, she captures the schizophrenic relationship between the two countries. It comes through, for example, in Khadivi's portrayal of Iranians' simultaneous conception of America as the Great Satan and the land of opportunity via the contrasting images of the humiliated and blindfolded American hostages versus those presented in the movies, the good-looking men and women with Hollywood smiles, free as birds, driving into the sun. She also shows that it is not only the Iranian idea of America that is schizophrenic, but the American dream itself. The coexistence of the beauty and ugliness of 'the land of dreams' is depicted through Saladin's endless walks in Los Angeles — a city where all the facets of the American dream/nightmare seem to be distilled. Through Saladin's eyes, the novel portrays the rugged, dirty reality of downtown LA with an otherworldly quality, as he encounters both brutal rejection and friendly acceptance in this strange city where it is not always possible to tell freaks apart from angels.



Unfortunately Khadivi's 'insider' perspective is slightly undermined by her effort to pack in too many of the



events that contributed to the hostilities which emerged between America and the Middle East in the second half of the twentieth century. She rightly sees a connection between the story of the Kurd's wish for more independence and autonomy, the thwarted dreams of the Iranian nation and the Islamic revolution on the one hand, and the role of the United States – under the Reagan administration – in the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan on the other. However, the scope of the novel does not allow her to address all these connections sufficiently. The story of the abused Afghan girl, Nafaz, who ends up working as a prostitute in LA, for example, is told somewhat hurriedly towards the end of the novel, leaving the reader to wonder at its significance. Another issue which might not catch the attention of non-Iranian readers but might disturb readers of the Iranian diaspora concerns certain questionable statements made in the novel such as the description of Iran as a 'young country' (55). The name 'Iran' has been used within the country for several centuries, although it was only in the 1930s that it became the official name of the region once known as Persia. In addition, given that the geographical boundaries of mainland Iran have remained more or less unchanged for the past 400 years, even from a modern geo-political point of view, it is inaccurate to call this country 'young'. Furthermore, the author conveys the idea that the Kurds of Iran feel like a homogenous ethnic group longing to found their own country. In reality, the Kurdish question is, of course, far from simple; this ethnic group is as diverse as the peoples of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, among whom the majority of Kurds live. Overall, however, and notwithstanding the fact that the territory that Khadivi has chosen to shed some light upon is a 'minefield' for both historians and novelists, the story nevertheless works. Khadivi manages to conjure a universal experience by depicting an individual fate and, in that way, her novel achieves what literature aspires to do, namely try to get closer to the *ur-story* of humankind.

## Madhu Krishnan

### The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958–1988

Susan Z Andrade

Duke University Press, Durham, 2012, pb  
272pp ISBN 0 8223 4921 3 £16.99  
www.dukepress.edu

### South Asian Feminisms

Ania Loomba and Ritty A Lukose, ed

Duke University Press, Durham, 2012, pb  
432pp ISBN 0 8223 5179 X £18.99  
www.dukepress.edu

Feminist theory and postcolonial studies have had an uneasy relationship. How can postcolonial theorisation address the issue of gender without imposing a normative framework? Can feminism be universalised across cultures? In recent years, these difficult questions have been addressed through an increased focus on gender and sexuality as constitutive dimensions of the colonial experience. Susan Z Andrade's monograph, *The Nation Writ Small: African Fictions and Feminisms, 1958–1988* and Ania Loomba and Ritty Lukose's edited collection, *South Asian Feminisms*, continue in this emerging tradition from two distinct disciplinary positions, with the common goal of recuperating gender as a category of analysis in postcolonial thinking.

*The Nation Writ Small* offers a feminist approach to novels from across the African continent. Andrade centres her monograph on the claim that feminist writers from Africa have been critically overlooked due to an overemphasis on 'a nationalist aesthetic [formed] around anticolonial resistance' (9). Using the concept of the 'nation writ small', Andrade redresses this lacuna by exploring the ways in which a portrayal of the domestic realm in feminist writing offers an opportunity to engage

differently with the politics of the Drawing on Jameson's concept of national allegory, Andrade offers reading of African feminist fiction the intimate and the public intert a multifaceted representational fu

The first half of the monograph addresses literary filiation. In an a of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* Nwapa's *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*, Andrade place works in dialogue with the Igbo W War of 1929, persuasively arguing t body of anthropological writing it i served as the central impetus for A work of writing back. *Things Fall Apart*, would inspire Nwapa's attempt to recuperate a space for female subj that the former author cannot add Yet, it is only with Emecheta as 'a s generation writer and as a daughter Andrade argues, that this difficult t may be addressed through a 'great freedom of engagement [that] thus permits more on the relation of ma politics to micro-politics' (45). The question of filiation is developed in francophone sphere in the second chapter, which examines Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*, Mariama Bâ's *Une longue lettre* and Aminatta Sow-Fal Grève des bâttu, tracing how each t forms a response to Fanon's seminal 'Pitfalls of National Consciousness', critiquing the degenerated national bourgeois through the figure of the husband.



The second half of Andrade's study examines the formation of individual subjectivity, first reading Nuruddin