Brecht in the Streets of Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Current theories of translation and theater, predominantly centered in a Euro-American context, are of limited applicability to settings that are culturally, economically, and socio-politically different from professional and mainstream theater spaces in the west. This paper explores the possibilities of expanding theories of theater translation through an interrogation of actual translational practices that take place in postcolonial and alternative performance spaces. This question is examined through the transcreations of Brecht's work by the Wayside and Open Theatre, the first political theater group in Sri Lanka, analyzing how they transform Brecht into powerful street performances that scrutinize the nature of power, violence, and silence in a postcolonial space. By examining these performances, I intend to reconsider accepted notions in studies of theater translation such as the assumed dichotomy between translator and director. The study also explores the complex modes of transference and retransference of power characterizing theater translations in postcolonial spaces. I will also explore the multiple variables that come into play in theater translations in alternative theater settings, and discuss why the term "transcreation" would be appropriate in identifying this process.

Introduction

> You artists who perform plays
> In great houses under electric suns
> Before the hushed crowd, pay a visit sometime
> To that theatre whose setting is the street.
> The everyday, thousandfold, fameless
> But vivid, earthy theatre fed by the daily human contact
> Which takes place in the street.[1]

In "On Everyday Theatre," Brecht entreats artists who perform "under electric suns" to observe everyday theater whose set-

[1] Bertolt Brecht, "On Everyday Theatre," in *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913–1956*, trans. John Willet and Ralph Manheim (New York: Methuen, 1976), 176.

ting is the street. Theater in the streets, for him, is daily interactions of people and he implores artists not to "become remote" from this theater, "[h]owever much [they] perfect [their] art." In this equation, Brecht establishes a distinction between the artists in great houses and the people, but ignores the artist who steps to the streets with the specific intention of performing for the people. Perhaps this omission occurs because Brecht's own work was confined to great houses, as his mission was to politicize the works that occurred inside them.[2] The street theater artist, however, takes Brecht's entreaty one step further, establishing a connection with "everyday theatre" by taking their performances to the streets. Brecht's invocation for the artist to investigate outside spaces extends beyond the theater artist to the literary critic when Mikhail Bakhtin illustrates the necessity of examining "the social life of discourse outside the artist's study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups" (Bakhtin 1981, 259) in order to understand the dynamics of living and evolving language. In this way, Brecht and Bakhtin invite artists and critics to venture out of "grand houses" and the "artist's study" into open spaces in order to witness "earthy theater" and the "still evolving contemporary reality" (Bakhtin 1981, 7), thus shifting away from the center toward an inquiry into the marginal and interstitial spaces. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o expands the debate by speaking about the necessity of "moving the center in [...] two senses - between nations and within nations" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1993, 17). He points out the significance of surpassing presumed centers of knowledge beyond the borders of the Euro-American context and speaks of "the need to move the centre from its assumed location in the West to a multiplicity of spheres in all the cultures of the world" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1993, 16). He furthermore illustrates the need to engage with local languages.

Though translation theorists have ventured beyond "location[s] in the West" to engage with translation practices in "multiplicity of spheres" in the world, studies of translation and theater

[2] In "Theater-in-the-street and the theater-in-theater," Peter Handke states, "Despite his revolutionary intent, Brecht was so very hypnotized by the idea of theater that his revolutionary intent always kept within the bounds of taste, in that he thought it tasteful that the spectators, since they remain spectators, should (be allowed to) enjoy themselves unlit" (Handke 1998, 8). The notion of the unlit audience is mostly present in performances that take place in enclosed theater buildings.

remain predominantly centered on mainstream theater settings in the Euro-American context. As a result, they do not always lend themselves to the elucidation of translational practices in alternative theater spaces—both in the global north and the global south—and theater models in diverse "cultures of the world." An inquiry into such modalities opens up a space to examine variables that have not entered the theater translation debate thus far. In this paper, I propose to explore the possibilities of expanding theories of theater translation through an interrogation of actual translational practices that take place in postcolonial and alternative performance spaces, specifically examining the works of the Wayside and Open Theatre, the first political theater group in Sri Lanka. In doing so, I move from the Euro-American context to a postcolonial setting and from mainstream theater practices to alternative performance spaces, probing the politics of translations that occur in the margins. Through an inquiry into these practices, I intend to reconsider certain accepted notions in studies of theater translation such as the assumed dichotomy between the translator and the director of a play. The study also explores the complex modes of transference and retransference of power that characterize theater translations that occur in postcolonial spaces. Engaging with Ronaldo de Campos's and Gamini Haththotuwegama's ideas related to various modes of translational/transcreational practice, I will also discuss why the term "transcreation" would be a more apt way of identifying this process.

Although Brecht, in urging artists to be inspired by the "earthy theater" of the streets, did not envision the possibility of the artist performing in the streets, his ideas have inspired many street theater artists and his works have been translated and transcreated in a variety of ways and taken to diverse audiences. It is to transcreations of Brecht's work that I turn in my effort to envisage a different translational model for theater. I will examine how his parable "Measures against Power," a text that scrutinizes the nature of power, violence, and silence, is transformed into a potent political theater piece in the Sri Lankan streets. Since the group constantly questions hegemonic power structures, it becomes interesting to see how they utilize this text in a transcreated form to address issues that are endemic to the current political situation in their respective contexts. The work goes through a tremendous

process of transformation in the transcreation process and assumes a life of its own, integrating local idioms and cultural signs while retaining the basic ideas of Brecht's work.

Translators and Directors

One of the ongoing debates regarding theater translation concerns the place of the theater text. Many translation theorists maintain that the theater text is singular because of its performance aspects, which means that it cannot be translated in the same fashion as any other text. As Susan Bassnett claims,"[t]he linguistic system is only one optional component in a set of interrelated systems that comprise the spectacle" (Bassnett 1980, 120) and the process where the linguistic sign is transferred into another and subsequently retransferred on to a visual and auditory spectacle is a multilayered one. As a result, "[t]heatre texts, and therefore also their translation, do not necessarily follow the same rules as texts in a literary system" (Aaltonen 2000, 7). The auditory and visual components and the live audience that factor in the final product make theater texts different from other textual translations.

Apart from the agreed factor of the particular nature of the theater text, many theoretical discussions of translating in theater are contingent on certain other assumed notions about the theater system. For one, there seems to be a consensus about the strict division between the role of the translator and the role of the director. Since they are perceived as performing separate acts, some theorists are intent on finding strategies to bridge this gap. Otrun Zuber, reiterating the boundary between the translator and director, proposes a scenario where the translator "produce[s] a reading edition [of the play] in the target language with comprehensive notes" and affirms that "[t]his would mean that the translator only points out the problems and the producer is left to solve them" (Zuber 1980, 73). Furthermore, the relationship between the two is presented as antagonistic when Phillis Zatlin asserts that "theatrical translators wish to be involved in the dynamics of rehearsals, standing in as the author's surrogate. But far too frequently, the translator is shunned aside" (Zatlin 2005, 4). In both cases, there is a strict separation established between the translator and the director, and in the latter case the relationship is even perceived as hostile. In fact, most of the theories are contingent on the idea that the theater trans-

lator and director are two different people; the process is seen as anything but a collaborative one.

Susan Bassnett, who has extensively explored the complexities inherent in theater translations, proceeds to make a distinction between the translator and the director in "A Case against Performability":

> whilst the principal problems facing a director and performers involves the transposing of the verbal into the physical, the principal problems facing the translator involve close engagement with the text on page and the need to find solutions for a series of problems that are primarily linguistic ones—differences in register involving age, gender, social position, etc. (Bassnett 1991, 111)

Bassnett clearly demarcates the roles of the translator, director, and performers. The translator's main problems are "primarily linguistic ones" based on the specifics of the context, whereas the director's problems involve the transposition of the verbal signs into physical ones. She argues that deciphering the gestic and visual signs is not a part of the translator's task. In fact, Bassnett's main argument in the essay is centered on critiquing the notion of performability, claiming that it is not a universal concept and should not be given prime importance in the process of translating plays: "The theatre texts cannot be considered as identical to texts written to be read because the process of writing involves a consideration of the performance dimension, but neither can an abstract notion of performance be put before textual considerations" (Bassnett 1991, 111). She is opposed to the idea of giving primacy to the idea of performativity when it comes to the translation of a theater text. Yet, in the case where a play translation is done with the specific aim of being performed, the idea of performance is no longer "an abstract notion" and is as concrete as the textual considerations. Such a duality between the written text and the performance is also questioned when the dichotomy between the translator and director is questioned. In fact, the performability factor gains ultimate significance when a translator/director translates with the distinct aim of performance because linguistic, gestural, visual, auditory, and a myriad of performative elements,[3] as well as the as the ideology of both systems, come into play.

[3] If a text is translated with the idea of being performed, performativity becomes such a significant dimension of the process.

Among translation theorists who write about theater, André Lefevere is one who does not make a strict separation between translators and directors in his works. Most of the examples he gives are of plays that are translated with the distinct intention of being performed.[4] Referring to H. R. Hayes's, Eric Bentley's, and Ralph Manheim's translations of Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder/Mother Courage and Her Children* in the United States (1941, 1967, and 1972, respectively), Lefevere (1998, 109-121) contends that theater translations are predominately influenced by the ideology of the receiving system, with the semiotic shifts in the translated texts occurring in response to the ideological workings of the target system: He states that "[t]ranslations are produced under constraints that go far beyond those of natural language—in fact, other constraints are often much more influential in the shaping of the translation than are the semantic or linguistic ones" (Lefevere 2000, 237). He illustrates how Eric Bentley and Hayes translate *Mother Courage* with the distinct aim of a subsequent performance of the play for a mainstream Broadway audience.[5] Though Bentley and Hayes are not the directors of the play, their intent of translating the play with a specific audience in mind changes the way in which the translation occurs. Thus, Hayes's motivation to depoliticize Brecht,[6] to separate him from Marx, does not occur as a result of his close engagement with the text, but because of his desire to get the play approved to be performed in the United States, and, more specifically, in the commercial space of Broadway.

If the politics of the receiving culture worked to diminish the political dimensions of Brecht's works when they were translated for the mainstream Broadway audience in the United States, the opposite occurs when Brecht is transported to the alternative theater setting in Sri Lanka, where Brecht's political ideas are used to critically probe an array of power politics within the target culture and to offer a rereading of Brecht's text. The artist there is more

[4] In the examples he provides, none of the translators are the directors of the plays, but he does not proceed from a preconceived notion of a director–translator binary.

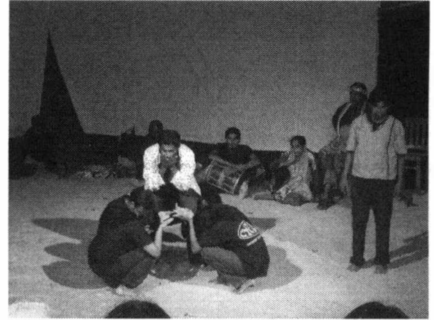
[5] Lefevere illustrates how "Hays and Bentley also do their best to integrate the songs, which Brecht uses as the 'alienation effect' *par excellence*, fully into the play, approximating the model of the musical" (Lefevere 1998, 115). Such transformations occur in terms of language, form, structure, and ideology as well.

[6] Lefevere shows the way "Hays also weakens the obvious connection between war and commerce in the person of Mother Courage by omitting [certain] lines Brecht gives her" (Lefevere 2000, 244).

intent on accentuating the political aspects and sharpening the political edge of the work.

Theater in the streets of Sri Lanka

While Bassnett, Lefevere, and Zuber speak about diverse aspects of translating in theater, the examples they consider are mostly European or American-based. Most of the theorists, except for Lefevere, also view the translator and director in binary terms, which is just one example of the ways in which a fundamental disconnect can arise in an attempt to apply these theoretical notions to theater translation in spaces that are culturally, economically, and sociopolitically different from the ones these theoreticians refer to. In Sri Lanka, for example, a strict division of labor does not characterize theater practice;[7] in fact, in this setting, the translator and director are often the same person. When one moves out of mainstream theater settings to practices of street theater in alternative spaces, one encounters yet another set of circumstances. The world that the street theater artist inhabits is one that is different from the study of the individual writer. The street theater artist's work is based on discussions, workshops, and group activities where performers work in unison to build up a particular piece.[8] In this context, the transcreation process can also be one in which several people participate. Also, as with the cases of the Wayside and Open Theatre, the translation could occur during the rehearsal process. There is input from other participants and the work is not based on an individual's isolated labor.



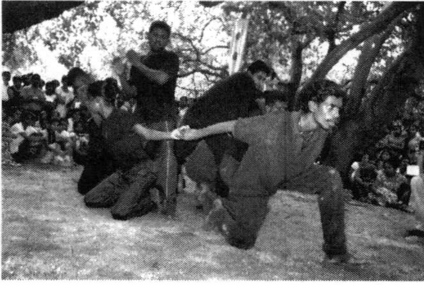
Dining.

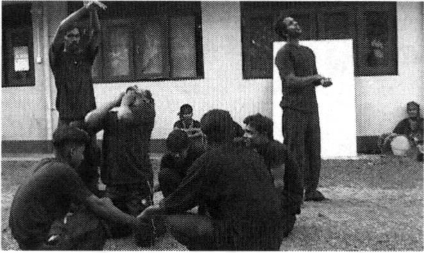
The guest asking for help.

Though there are many aspects of the process of translation that take place in alternative theater spaces, in this article I focus on understanding the workings of the translation process when the

[7] Translation has played a decisive role in the development of modern Sinhala theater and theater translations remain to this day one of the main components of the art form.

[8] This type of dynamic occurs in alternative theater practices in Euro-American contexts as well, particularly in works by community and devised theater groups. My focus in this article is alternative performance spaces in the postcolonial context and thus will not be expanding this area.


Taking a bath.


Taking a bath.

Listening to the Fox-girl story.

translator and the director are the same person. In such a context, the translator/director has to consider a multiplicity of elements ranging from the linguistic, visual, and auditory to the spatial, and needs to deliberate the ideological dimensions embedded in all these elements. My exploration of this question is thus closely related to the hegemonic power relations that exist between the source and the target cultures and the director/translator's efforts to negotiate the ideological dimensions of the process. If the translator/director's sole idea of translating a play is dependent on a future production, how does that change the trajectory of the translational process? In such a context, the translator does not have the luxury to leave physical, gestic, and verbal interpretations for the director or the performer and often works with a clear direction in mind. For example, for a director/translator such as Gamini Haththotuwegama, one of the pioneers of the Wayside and Open Theatre, the main purpose of translating Brecht and Chekhov was to take "classic" texts to people who do not generally have the chance to experience them. When the goal is clearly defined, and the binary between the translator and director is nonexistent, and translation in theater acquires a different significance. The translator/director has to think beyond the linguistic aspects of the text to envision the ways in which the text will be enacted with regards to its gestural, visual, auditory, and performative aspects. In order to address this dynamic, I will examine several elements that enter the translator/director's repertoire as he transcreates a specific piece in a context far different from the one in which it was originally created. The translational works I explore here are not originally dramatic texts *per se*, but transcreations of Brecht's poems and parables into theatrical pieces.

Transcreation and the Postcolonial Performance Space

In my discussion thus far, I have fluctuated between the terms translation and transcreation. In many senses, the term transcreation is more apt at capturing the process that the street theater artist in the postcolonial setting is engaged in. The notion of transcreation entered translation studies through the work of the Brazilian poet, critic, and translator Haroldo De Campos. For him, translation "is less an act of synthesizing or an act of resolution of the contradictions than a radical operation of transcreation (*operacao radical de transcriacao* 1981:18) that creates new, tangential lines of communication" (Gentzler 2008, 13). He sees translation "as transgressive appropriation and hybridism (or cross-breeding) as the dialogic practice of expressing the other and expressing oneself through the other, under the sign of difference" (De Campos 1997, 13). In such a view, the linear teleology of translation, the assumption of a knowledge flow from one direction to the other is questioned. What occurs instead is a more complex integration of difference, creating a dialogic relationship between the two texts and contexts. De Campos develops his conception of transcreation through his engagement with Oswald de Andrade's "Cannibalist Manifesto." De Campos especially points out the phrase "Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question," calling it a "phonic usurpation, a mistranslation by homophony, of Shakespeare's famous dilemmatic verse" (De Campos 1997, 13). Thus, while "Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question" immediately evokes the quandary of the uncertain Prince of Denmark, for the Brazilian audiences, it also evokes the "the general language spoken by Brazilian Indians at the time of Brazil's discovery" (De Campos 1997, 13), which references the colonial moment, conjuring up images of the massacre of the native inhabitants. Translation becomes a "transgressive appropriation" within such contexts where the rewriting opens up space for multiple meanings and significations. Thus, this process of appropriation, or to use De Campos's term, devouring, is not carried out "from a submissive and reconciled perspective of the 'good savage,' but from a brazen point of view of the 'bad savage' devourer of white people, anthropophagus" (De Campos 1997, 14). Slightly resonating with Caliban's famous utterance, "You taught me language, and my profit on't/Is I know how to curse" (Shakespeare 2007, I.ii.366-368), where the learning of the master's language en-

ables Caliban to curse him, in this instance, the "bad savage" irreverently devours the master's text and transcreates it through an integration of local traditions and knowledges. Translation becomes a "radical act of transcreation."

Consequently, rather than uncritically embracing texts coming from the West, the anthropophagic translator takes the essence of the works and transforms them to address the Brazilian cultural-political context. This concept gives more agency to the translator and to the formerly colonized subject rendering her an active creator of knowledge. As Edwin Gentzler states, "[s]uch a rewriting of European classics through the phonetic and cultural background of Brazil results in new meanings and insights unique to Brazil that get woven into a sophisticated translation practice that leads to new definitions of translation as transcreation or transculturalization" (Gentzler 2008, 82). The hegemonic relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the "classic" Western text and indigenous traditions is questioned in this context and the "European classics" are no longer perceived as ultimate "nuggets of knowledge" (Woolf 1929, 3). They become acculturated and transformed by the cultural practices of Brazil.

Speaking about the discovery of "the English book" (the Bible), and specifically referencing Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Homi Bhabha argues that a reversion of power occurs when the English book is not taken to be the ultimate authority, but a source of ambivalence which enables the colonized subject to vision a mode of resistance. He asserts that

> If the effect of the colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonial authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (Bhabha 1994, 160)

Both De Campos and Bhabha question the primacy of the Western word, the logos albeit in two contexts. Their premise—the idea of seeing colonial power as creating hybridization rather than merely serving as a mode of authority—directs one towards a change of perspective. In such a situation, "Tupi or not Tupi" is *Hamlet*, but also the language of the Brazilian Indians. While Ham-

let is struggling to protect his father's legacy, "The Cannibalist Manifesto" appropriates the lines and in the "phonic usurpation" draws attention to the colonial situation and the destruction and dilemma caused by the colonial legacy. Hence, rather than following a teleological trajectory, meaning speaks to multiple levels and directions.

I would like to bring Gamini Haththotuwegama to the transcreational debate at this point. Though Haththotuwegama has not explicitly written about translation, he has extensively spoken about it through his practical engagement in the field.[9] One of the pioneers of political street theater in Sri Lanka, Haththotuwegama was a scholar, writer, performer, and director. He was a translator who transcreated works such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Jean Anouilh's *The Lark* to be performed in mainstream and alternative theater spaces, and also transcreated works by Brecht and Chekhov for the Wayside and Open Theatre. Growing up, Haththotuwegama was firmly enmeshed in an English language and literature background and exposed to traditional performances from a young age. He started his theatrical life doing English theater, but changed the direction of his theatrical ventures in a fundamental way in the 1970s by becoming a part of the street theater group.[10] Deviating from an urban theater practice that he saw as exclusively addressing a middle class audience, he worked with the group to take theater to disparate audiences all over the country.

Haththotuwegama preferred the word transcreation over translation. He used the term transcreation to indicate how a text from a specific context goes through a linguistic and cultural transformation and takes on a new form and meaning in a different sociopolitical and cultural setting. From his time as an English teacher and then subsequently a lecturer in the Department of English and Fine Arts, his works were a mixture of Western works and indige-

[9] He presented a paper on translation titled "Translation Theory Drives Me Mad: An Anti-Pedagogical Confession" for the second annual translation conference held in 2005 in Kandy, Sri Lanka. His talk is not recorded, but his abstract remains.

[10] The Wayside and Open Theatre formed as an alternative, nonformal theater in 1974. Moving away from the predominately bourgeois proscenium theaters, they performed in the streets, factories, temple premises, universities, and urban slum areas. It was the group's stated goal to make theater spectatorship an intellectual, critical exercise for as many people as possible.

nous traditions. In 1961, he produced *Shakespeare in Sarong*,[11] the title itself indicating the transformation of the bard to a Sri Lankan setting, where "good old Shakespeare appeared as Narrator, clad in long cloth and coat, sporting a 'konde' and twirling an umbrella" (Haththotuwegama 2005, 345). Shakespeare, the bard in traditional garb, thus becomes incorporated into the local setting. Yet, his idea was not merely predicated on turning Shakespeare into a local character, embodying indigenous characteristics. It was based on a larger idea of culture and encounters. His question, "Certainly, if we grew up with Shakespeare, why not have alternative Shakespeare growing up with us?" (Haththotuwegama 2012, 345), shows the possibility of generating multiple meanings and constructing multiple realities. A space opens up to question the monolithic idea of a Shakespeare and expand Shakespeare to myriad possibilities. Ashley Halpe recalls Haththotuwegama's transcreation of *Hamlet*:[12] its "style was highly eclectic, drawing on the Nâdagam, Kôlam and Nurti[13] forms of the Sinhala theater, on the director's substantial experience of the political Street Drama which he developed for Sri Lanka, and on some British and continental models and readings" (Halpe 2010, 56). The creative transcreation of *Hamlet* occurs in a space that interweaves Shakespeare, Western theatrics, indigenous theater forms, and the political street theater. Halpe asserts that, "fluid, 'rough,' dynamic, this production liberated Shakespeare" (Halpe 2010, 59).

Haththotuwegama's production of *Hamlet* was done for a predominately university audience with a cast drawn mostly from the student body and some of the parts enacted by street theater performers. The situation was similar in the trilingual transcreation of Brecht's poem, "Difficulty of Governing." He created this play with his students at Kelaniya University, with the participation of some members of the street theater group. Neloufer de Mel recalls how they built the piece "workshop style [...] dramatizing each

[11] A fabric wrapped around the waist; traditional attire in South Asia.

[12] *Hamlet* was translated by Haththotuwegama, Gamini Fonseka Edirisingha, and Lakshman Fernando. Haththotuwegama and Haig Karunarathne codirected the play. It was first performed in 1990.

[13] Nâdagam was a folk drama in which stylistic dances and music were used. Kôlam, a ceremony that utilized masks and stylized performance methods, was a performance practice that belonged to the coastal areas of Sri Lanka. Some of these performances still exist today, but not as often as before. Nurti, which were popular in the cities, consisted mostly of musicals and often were direct replicas of Indian Parsee pieces.

verse."[14] Brecht's poem about power and governance transformed into a forty-minute play, offering a satirical commentary on the changing political and economic landscape in Sri Lanka. In 1977, the newly elected United National Party government instituted the executive presidency, centralizing power around the presidential office,[15] and the play interweaved this historic fact into the poem, reinventing the Brecht poem in a contemporary Sri Lankan context. The play was episodic in structure, integrating traditional dance movements, transformed folk songs, and local idioms. Brecht's lines such as "Without ministers/ Corn would grow into the ground, not upward"[16] paved the way for the group to satirize recent political events such as politicians taking part in paddy harvesting while wearing tennis shoes.[17] Haththotuwegama states that the current political situation in Sri Lanka enabled them to further elicit the humor from the Brecht poem. Quite ironically, the trilingual Brecht transcreation was banned in 1978 for criticizing the government.

Haththotuwegama's concept of transcreation resembles that of De Campos's idea in certain ways. Though he does not use a devouring metaphor, he does conceive translation as going beyond a one-way process. He inquires, "[i]f translation is 'hegemonic,' is it a one-way process necessarily? While 'creating contexts of governance' does it not liberate them? If there is 'transference of power through language' isn't there possibly a re-transference of power?" (Haththotuwegama 2005). Thus, there is a tendency on the part of postcolonial translators and practitioners to see translation as more than a mere transference of power in one direction. While translation creates contexts of governance, it also functions to liberate them; thus the need for alternate Shakespeares. These theorists question the notion of the one directional epistemic flow. Knowledge is more multifaceted; the moment Shakespeare enters the Sri Lankan setting, he encounters difference, and this difference helps render Shakespeare more creative and dynamic, liberating him. Such an act has further implications. Haththotuwegama asserts that "I think the very act of going to our own creative works and going

[14] Interview with Neloufer de Mel, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2010.

[15] The balance of power between executive, legislature, and judiciary was changed in favor of the executive.

[16] Bertolt Brecht, "Difficulty of Governing," 295.

[17] Interview with Haththotuwegama, Bokundara, Sri Lanka, 2010.

through them to the Western 'models' can be a decolonizing venture" (Haththotuwegama 2012, 345). The encounter here is more interactive than hegemonic or hierarchical and thus paves the way for a more hybrid and integrated model of transcreation. Transcreation is thus not a mere transference of a text from one context to another, but a process through which a text from another context is utilized not only to gain an understanding of the source culture, but to cast a critical eye on the receiving system. The hierarchy between the two texts is suspended.[18]

Haththotuwegama asserts that his ideas of transcreation were formed through his practical engagement in the field, a fact that becomes obvious when one considers his transcreation of Bertolt Brecht's parable "Measures against Power." The text undergoes transformations in terms of language, performance, and genre. The parable, which is considered to be a fragment of a play,[19] becomes a full blown performance piece in the streets of Sri Lanka. A close look at the piece illustrates that the parable about "the time of illegality" acquires a completely different signification in the postcolonial Sri Lankan setting. The play still addresses notions of power, rule, and authority, but the nature and mode of that power relationship changes in the Wayside performance. The transcreated piece establishes a dialogic relationship between Brecht's notions of power and the political context in Sri Lanka. What all these theorists are drawing our attention to is a process of demystifying the power of the Western text, the Western logos. Such a practice also reveals the hybridity of the Western text. After all, Brecht's dramatics were hugely influenced by Chinese opera and that fact also becomes a part of the discourse. In the hierarchical world of knowledge production, where the economically and politically powerful nations are deemed to have supremacy when it comes to writing and the arts, the arts and knowledge of the formerly colo-

[18] This is not to ignore the unequal economic and political power hierarchy between the two contexts. The economic factor is particularly pronounced in the publishing industry and copyright laws as they affect contexts in the global North.

[19] Some of the theater projects that Brecht was working on in the second half of the 1920s were not completed. In is introduction to Brecht's *Stories of Mr. Keuner*, Martin Chalmers asserts that "Brecht detached a number of these brief commentary fragments from the dramatic context, reworked them so that they could stand independently, and wrote new pieces of a similar kind. These became the Stories of Mr. Keuner, the first eleven of which were published in 1930" (Brecht 2001, 97).

nized nations is relegated to the periphery. Yet, by creatively weaving that knowledge with the hegemonic products of the West, the postcolonial transcreator invents a new product that pierces, defiles, and enriches the Western text, rendering it more polyvalent and complex. The postcolonial artist transgresses, transforms, and transcreates, and "newness enters the world" (Rushdie 1991, 394).

Measures against Power/Marawara Mehewara

"I'd rather be a hammer than a nail, yes I would, if I could": the performers of the Wayside and Open Theatre sing the first lines of Simon and Garfunkel's song "El Condor Pasa" (1970) to a popular Sri Lankan folk rhythm and the accompaniment of a traditional drum. After the first verse in English, they shift to the Sinhala transcreation of the song where the affirmative lines in the original transform into questions: "What is your preference for, is it the centropus or the snail?" Following a slightly louder beat of the drum and a pause, the song changes to Bob Marley and Peter Tosh's "Get Up Stand Up" (1973) as the drum continues to provide the beat necessary for the singers. As these songs are sung in the background, the performance space comes to life. Four actors enter, all in black, and create a door with their bodies. Another performer begins a motion of sweeping the floor with a broom. As the songs end, we hear someone utter "hello." The "guest"[20] has arrived. What we are about the witness is the transcreation of Bertolt Brecht's parable "Measures against Power" as *Marawara mehewara* (*Thug Service/Thug Come, Come Here*).[21]

"Measures against Power" is a commentary on power—political, social, and personal. According to the Brecht parable an agent arrives at Mr. Egger's house and assumes an utterly privileged position.[22] After forcing Mr. Eggers to feed him and attend

[20] There are two characters in Brecht's "Measures against Power": the agent, and Mr. Eggers. In the performance, the characters are not given names; we encounter the self-identified guest and the silent host. I will refer to the characters as the "guest" and the "host" in my analysis of The Wayside and Open Theatre's *Merawara Mehewara* and refer to the character as the agent and Mr. Eggers when I talk refer to Brecht's parable.

[21] The Sinhala version has a double entendre. One of the main characteristics of Haththotuwegama's work is his wordplay, particularly his use of allusive puns and his penchant for imbricate phrases.

[22] According to Mr. Keuner, who recounts the story, "[t]he agent showed a document, which was made in the name of those who ruled the city, and which stated that any apartment in which he set foot belonged to him; likewise, any food he demanded belonged to him; likewise, any man he saw, had to serve him" (Brecht 2001, 3).

to his innumerable needs, the agent, without even looking at Mr. Eggers, asks, "Will you be my servant?" Mr. Eggers is silent:

> Mr. Eggers covered the agent with a blanket, drove away the flies, watched over his sleep, and as he had done on this day, obeyed him for seven years. But whatever he did for him, one thing Mr. Eggers was careful not to do: that was, to say a single word. Now, when the seven years had passed and the agent had grown fat from all the eating, sleeping, and giving orders, he died. Then Mr. Eggers wrapped him in the ruined blanket, dragged him out of the house, washed the bed, whitewashed the walls, drew a deep breath and replied: "No." (Brecht 2001, 4)

Mr. Keuner[23] recounts this story to his students when they confront him about his stance towards Power. The story explores diverse dimensions of power such as institutional systemic authority and personal relationships within contexts of oppression. The parable, moreover, complicates the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed and examines the significance of silence. The agent is aggressive and feels entitled, demanding to be treated with utmost hospitality; Mr. Eggers does not utter a single word until the end.

"Measures against Power" was transcreated as *Marawara Mehewara* by Gamini Haththotuwegama in 2000 and further developed during rehearsals. A close examination of *Marawara Mehewara* illustrates how it weaves an intricate web of signifiers from different contexts to comment on contemporary power politics and the changing social ethos. *Marawara Mehewara* examines issues pertaining to colonial/neocolonial power, neoliberalism, gender, and class. The parable, as it is performed in the Sri Lankan setting, retains the basic structure of Brecht's story, while absorbing local lullabies, popular songs, and stories of foxes and grape preservatives. Not only does *Marawara Mehewara* present us with a solid example of a transcreation as it occurs in a postcolonial alternative performance setting, but it also opens up the space to investigate the dynamics inherent in a process where the translator transcreates with the exclusive idea of performing the piece.

Haththotuwegama, the translating director or the directing translator, has two tasks here: the first is to conceptualize the best

[23] Chalmers affirms that "[t]he fictional character of Mr. Keuner, 'the thinking man,' and the stories told by or about him, originated in the second half of the 1920s" (Brecht 2001, 97).

possible way to familiarize the somewhat abstract Brecht narrative for diverse audiences in the country, the second is to envision the performance aspects of the play including how to enact it with the current members of the group. In the process, he also needs to take heed of the conditions of the eventual performance spaces and foresee how to visually enact the tension and the power imbalance between the two characters. He has to make the narrative appeal to many different audiences, some of whose encounter with Brecht is not extensive. Haththotuwegama, the translator, cannot "only [point] out the problems" and leave the director "to solve them" (Zuber 1980, 73) because he is the director as well. He is aware of the unpredictable and diverse audiences the group will encounter during their performances. The conceptual mapping of the translation thus encompasses visual, gestural and spatial elements, apart from the linguistic and cultural transference. As a practitioner of political street theater, he also has to consider the ideological dimensions of the texts.

In Haththotuwegama's transcreation, the agent's presumed superiority and entitlement, his unwavering assumption that "the other" would serve him, adopts significations pertaining to the postcolonial setting, transporting images of the colonial narrative and how the native inhabitants were exploited by a series of colonizers who mistook their generosity for a sign of weakness. The guest constantly reminds the host of the ways of traditional hospitality and forces him to perform such rituals prevalent in Sri Lankan society. In his performative of "traditional hospitality," the host appears submissive and unquestioningly complies with the guest's wishes. The entitled guest, on the other hand, acts with total ease in the other's space and expands and stretches his body, enclosing the space visually, while the host remains withdrawn. The guest's incessant chatter and aggressive manner stands as an absolute contrast to the more subservient and silent mannerisms of the host. Furthermore, the play is particularly remarkable in the way in which it makes use of the actors' bodies in the construction of stage props. The use of the human bodies is visually striking and metaphorically contributes to the critique of the exploitation of fellow human beings. The human bodies transform into a bed, a bathtub, and a chair, which the guest so freely makes use of; he sits and sleeps on them in the most entitled manner.

Such power dynamics are implicated and explored not only through the story of the "guest" and the "host," but also through a story that the host reads to the guest: the transcreated fox and the bitter grapes fable, a considerable addition that takes up a majority of the performing time. The "host" in *Marawara Mehewara* is forced to read an animal fable to the "guest,"[24] unlike Brecht's parable where Mr. Eggers is silent till the end. The story within the story deserves close analysis because the animal fable depicts numerous instances where varying dynamics of power and relationships are explored. These additions bring up familiar elements from popular culture, while elucidating the Brecht narrative, enabling differential readings of it.

The folk stories are transformed in the new global economic order. The fox does not come across an unreachable bunch of grapes on a vine higher up, but instead notices a little girl on top of a tree,[25] eating a slice of bread with Australian butter and grape preservatives. These two items allow the Wayside group to engage in their customary critique of the neoliberal economy and consumerism. Just as these economic transformations have changed all areas of life, at the end of the fox fable, the familiar and perhaps most sung Sinhala lullaby undergoes a change as well. The mother is unable to feed her child not because the container of milk floated in the river as the old lullaby has it, but because she cannot afford to buy expensive dairy products. What is transcreated is not only the Brecht narrative, but also centuries-old folk tales and popular lullabies.

The fox–girl story further explores gender and power. The cunning fox is defeated by the silent girl sitting on top of a tree; she is unperturbed by his chatter. He tries to cajole her by stating that he will procure her the opportunity to sing on a popular radio station. Undisturbed by his words, she silently gobbles down the slice of bread. Silence does not necessarily implicate weakness because the little girl ends up getting the bread. The outcome of the

[24] While Mr. Eggers only utters the powerful "No" at the end of Brecht's narrative, the "host" in *Marawara Mehewara* is given more of a voice when he reads the story—he only reads and never comments or responds to the guest's questions or remarks. Yet, his tonal variations are important.

[25] In both instances, the two girls are unclothed. Their nudity does not add anything to the narrative except for a crude sense of humor that creates laughter in the audience. Thus, though the question of gender and power figure into the story, it simultaneously propagates sexist humor. The issue of gender in the works of the Wayside and Open Theatre require more extensive discussion.

fox's next encounter with another little girl[26] remains ambiguous, an ambiguity that reflects the relationship between the host and the guest. This fact is further emphasized by the guest's imitation of and identification with the fox: he disapproves when the child eats the bread and is dismissive of girls on top of trees, exhibiting a certain patriarchal viewpoint about proper behavior for women. The guest enacts the fox's role as the host reads the story, and in the end he is on all fours howling and hooting. He identifies and empathizes with the fox by extolling his shrewdness. The story within the story—read by the host—comments on the frame narrative and the complex nature of power.

It is obvious that the Brecht parable has taken on a whole different life in the streets of Sri Lanka. The postcolonial Sri Lankan setting endows the narrative with multiple significations —the old fox fable connecting with other narratives spatially and temporally—as the story advances from the colonial narrative to a neocolonial moment, the fable changes from a desire for grapes to desire for a slice of bread with grape preservatives and Australian butter, and the way to coax the girl is to tell her that she will be given a chance to sing in a popular radio station, an allusion to reality shows that have become a pervasive element in the popular culture. The story within the story captures the change in the social fabric as a result of the open economy.

The guest does not notice the host's tonal variations as he reads because he is more focused on the story and subsequently disappointed by the story's abrupt ending, which occurs as the fox approaches the second girl. The guest, who falls asleep disappointed by the ambiguous ending of the story, suddenly wakes up with breathing difficulties; he signals the host to help him and the host obeys. When the guest wakes up again gasping for breath and furiously gestures for the host to help him, the host does not budge. At this particular moment, the play changes direction; there is a tangible shift in power. The host, immobile, stares as the agent painfully arrives at his death—a silent, wordless death. The host checks the guest's pulse to make sure that he is indeed dead. He then thrusts him to the floor and repeats the demands made by the

[26] The words "little girl" are repeated and one can inquire as to why the littleness is emphasized multiple times.

entitled guest in a stifled voice: "Will you feed me? Will you bring me water?, etc." As he reiterates the demands, his voice rises in a crescendo. The final act of defiance is exhibited when he screams with certainty: "No"[27]—the ultimate moment of his silent resistance, culminating in a powerful "no."

The "no," uttered with firmness, critically overturns the actions of the guest. For the first time, the host is standing over the guest's body—thus reversing their spatial levels. The enactment of the scene with visual elements, the positioning of the guest and the host, the particular gestures, pauses, and the sudden stillness of the guest's body, who thus far was animated and free, contrasts with his dead stillness in the end. In Haththotuwegama's transcreation of the play, the signification of the word "no," as translated into Sinhala, accompanies the visual enactment of the power dynamics, which are most fully reversed through the movement of the other performers—who thus far were bodies that created props—as they push the guest's dead body out. We are faced with a situation where the principal problem of the translation involves the transformation of the verbal into the physical as well as finding solutions to the linguistic issues. And at times the solutions to the linguistic issues reside in physical ones. Such a process makes the task of the translator/director more complicated and more exciting because the "no" for the translating director is not a mere "no"; rather, it is surrounded by the actions, gestures, and movements of defiance and subversion. The "no" is uttered against colonial oppression, neocolonial power politics, exploitation in terms of class and cultural hospitality, and gender. It gives voice to the little girl on the tree, relates to the other little girl in the front yard, and integrates all the elements of the various folk stories. I am not stating that a theater translator who is not simultaneously the director is unable to conceptualize such complications; they certainly do, as Lefevere has comprehensively illustrated in his analysis of Bentley and Hayes's translation of *Mother Courage*. His examples thoroughly illustrate how the ideology of the target culture dominates their work because they were intent on introducing Brecht to the United States. What I want to point out is that the politics and the poetics of the target

[27] The "no" is translated into Sinhala as "Nae and Bae," and the host utters both words. They respectively stand for "no" and "I won't."

culture become all the more prominent and pressing when the translator is the director because for him the audience, space, and performance are not abstractions, but concrete events. The transcreation process is one where all these elements are taken into consideration simultaneously.

Conclusion

The Brecht narrative enables Haththotuwegama to explore the power dynamics within contemporary society as he devours the text with ease to create a product that not only captures Brecht's ideas of power, but also offers a critique of neocolonial, class, and gender politics in Sri Lankan society. This text, "produced in the borderline between two systems" (Lefevere 2000, 234), not only illustrates "the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference" (Bhabha 1994, 325), but also shows that "[t]ranslation is the performative nature of Cultural communication" (Bhabha 1994, 326). In Haththotuwegama's words, it is "a two-way process." Translating with the intent of performing necessitates the consideration of linguistic, ideological, and performative aspects of the text. On such a level, what often occurs is a devouring of the text, a radical act of transcreation. This creative act envisions spatial relations, the physical enactment of the text, and considers the diverse live audiences. Hence, the translator/director is not the type who faithfully copies and mimics, but one who transfuses, demonically devours, and creates a new product. Thus, Haththotuwegama's transcreation is not a "passivizing theory of copy or reflection, but [...] a usurping impulse in the sense of a dialectic production of differences out of sameness" (De Campos 1997, 18). The translators/directors work in a setting where the linguistic, gestural, auditory, performative, ideological, cultural, and spatial dimensions combine to generate the transcreation. It is with all these elements in mind that the translating director and the directing translator set to work and it is a multifaceted project—in other words, one of the best moments of transcreation. In Brecht's words,

> They do not, like parrot or ape
> Imitate just for the sake of imitation, unconcerned
> What they imitate, just to show that they
> Can imitate; no, they
> Have a point to put across. (Brecht 1976, 176)

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