

## **INclusivity in the OUTdoors. Injustice of multiple inequalities... and how do we talk about it?**

### **Intersectionality issues of access within ‘The Great Outdoors’ (12 mins)**

Talk by Jamie Mcphie

(play Trainspotting sketch, ‘The Great Outdoors’)

Ignoring, for the moment, the culture wars that many right-wingers are creating either in parliament or elsewhere; in the UK, if you are working class and underprivileged, the stats say you are much less likely to (have) access to ‘the great outdoors’. If you are non-white, the stats say you are much less likely to (have) access to the ‘great outdoors’. If you are working class, underprivileged, and are non-white, the stats say you will have little to no access at all to the ‘great outdoors’. There are many obvious ‘and’ complex reasons for this, such as economic inequality, implicit bias, historical racial violence, lack of peer activity, a fear of discrimination, a lack of culturally appropriate provisions, etc. but ‘epistemological accessibility’ is largely omitted from the credit. What I’m talking about is an inaccessibility to a certain ‘knowledge’ of/about (and way of being, in) the green and pleasant landscape of the English countryside, and a lack of ‘cultural habit’ of visiting – due to the cultural constructions that have been and are still sculpted by the dominant hegemonic group (some say the elite of society).

In a recent Guardian article, columnist Marina Hyde said of Mark Zuckerbergs Facebook origins, Facemash, ‘I can’t believe a product created to rate women has ended up as what the business professor and tech commentator Scott Galloway calls “the biggest prostitute of hate in the history of mankind”. Honestly, what were the chances?’ (Hyde, 2021), she said sarcastically. What’s highlighted here is that inequitable origins are infused in the phenomenon and often raise their ugly heads when played out, often via implicit bias. The foundations of an idea stay with it. No wonder Westernised landscapes and outdoor environmental ideologies are still so white, so privileged. It’s like the Japanese knotweed, you have to tackle it at its roots. You need to deconstruct before you reconstruct.

There are different inequities of access to ‘the great outdoors’ for issues of class, race and gender that have surprising histories that intersect. Very briefly, I’d like to take you back to certain moments and people in history to exemplify what I mean, starting with Wordsworth, and then relate them to the accessibility issues we face today.

Now, to make my point here, when I mentioned Wordsworth, I bet most of you thought William didn’t you? Why not Dorothy or Mary? Arguably, they added as much to the final assembled poetic product as William.

There are intersectional issues at play here, involving gender, race and class, that highlight the inequities rife in landscape perceptions. The Picturesque and Romantic periods of the 18th and 19th centuries were driven by wealthy white Europeans and as such limited epistemological access to walking in Sublime landscapes. Poet William Wordsworth knew that the ‘romanticised’ mountains of Cumbria were inaccessible to the working classes and wished to keep them this way. In 1844 in a letter to the press Wordsworth explained ‘members of the working class would not have the capacity to appreciate the “beauty” and

“character of seclusion and retirement” that the Lakes District had to offer [...] it can be produced only by a slow and gradual process of culture’ (Wordsworth, cited in Schwartz, n.d., paras. 5-7). What is created here is an elite epistemological (in)accessibility to certain landscapes which is, in turn, an (in)accessibility to an elitist construction of knowledge. This elitist cultural construct is still evident today.

My own research in Cumbria found class inequities in perceptions and access to various outdoor landscapes, where some of the participants/researchers suggested, ‘green is dirty’, and the great outdoors related to middle-class sensibilities, not underprivileged ones (Mcphie, 2019). And when it comes to the distinctions of the Lake District national park and Cumbria, there’s an ‘in’ and an ‘out’!

Regional and racial inequalities intersect.

White supremacists have versions of nature that often distort Darwinian theorisations in order to raise their own idealised positions of power. Many nature writers also fit into this category. In the UK, *Tarka the Otter*’s author, Henry Williamson famously expressed his fascism through his nature writing. In fact, by its very nature, there can be no ‘writing about nature’ or ‘nature writer’ that is not complicit in co-creating inequitable social environments, if that version of nature is a privileged one. And almost all the versions of nature in modern Western literature are privileged versions, mostly written by white, middle-class men. (Mcphie & Clarke, forthcoming<sup>a</sup>)

Therefore, it's crucial to push for more calls for writing with other versions of nature, by writers who are not white, middle-class, or even heterosexual men (as this implicit lens can lead to heteronormative perceptions of a gendered nature, for example).

Following in the footsteps of the emerging national-socialist influenced German green party, the outdoor summer camps of the English fascist movement in the 1930s (see Cutting 2016) romanticised the rural environments of ‘England’s green and pleasant land’, one that had colonised and homogenised many of the world’s environments. Biehl and Staudenmaier suggest the Nazi Party's interest in ecology was ‘linked with traditional agrarian romanticism and hostility to urban civilization’ (cited in Wilson, 2019). In contrast, a socialist-communist perspective of urban-rural dichotomies led some scholars to challenge the growing perception that urban was bad and rural was good. A recent Guardian article entitled, ‘German far right infiltrates green groups with call to protect the land’ (Oltermann, 2020), points out that far-right extremists are exploiting ‘rural nostalgia and farmers’ anger at globalisation’. This reminds me of how the Reich Minister of Food and

Agriculture, Richard Darre, idealised his ‘Blood and Soil’ in order to boost the populism of Hitler’s ideology. (Mcphie & Clarke, forthcoming<sup>a</sup>)

Ernst Haeckel who coined the term ‘ecology’ in 1866 was a fascist. Jan Smuts, who re-interpreted the concept of ‘Holism’ was a white supremacist. David Foreman, co-founder of earth-first and influencer of modern re-wilding schemes, stated, ‘When I tell people the worst thing we could do in Ethiopia is to give aid---the best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve---they think this is monstrous. . . . Likewise, letting the USA be an overflow valve for problems in Latin America is not solving a thing. It's just putting more pressure on the resources we have in the USA.’ Foreman’s callous view is completely misleading as it presupposes equal consumption of resources among vastly unequal economic groups. (Mcphie & Clarke, forthcoming<sup>a</sup>)

Over a period of about 10 years, between the 1980’s and 1990’s, roughly 3 million people globally were forced to move from their tribal lands and other areas due to development and conservation schemes (Vidal, 2001). Corry (2011) states that some of these conservation schemes have ‘involved the destruction of the resident indigenous peoples, and the problem is now growing more acute as conservationists press harder for governments to set aside ‘natural’ areas, which in reality have been lived on for generations’ (p. 211). This is not surprising if we deconstruct the conceptual heritage of conservation and rewilding schemes. The inherent racial bias of the ‘father of national parks’, John Muir, saw no place for first nation people in wilderness landscapes (Melley, 2020). Wilderness defined as ‘untrammelled by man’ becomes a racist ideology when we look at its effects. The Sierra Club has recently apologised for racist comments made by John Muir, who is said to have perpetuated a history of white supremacy (Melley, 2020). ‘For all the harms the Sierra Club has caused, and continues to cause, to Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color, I am deeply sorry’ (Michael Brune, cited in Melley, 2020). (Mcphie & Clarke, forthcoming<sup>b</sup>)

If the so-called founding ‘fathers’ of ecology (Haeckel), conservation (Muir), rewilding (Foreman), romanticised sublime landscapes for leisure (Wordsworth), developed these concepts as integral parts of their elitist or racist, white supremacist or even fascist ideologies,

surely...*surely*, there is an ethical imperative to investigate how these potentially hateful skeletal underpinnings play-out in contemporary understandings of outdoor participation (including conservation and rewilding schemes).

These skeletal bones that were sculpted by patriarchal white supremacists and privileged classes, are still resonating today in the white, privileged landscapes and pastimes of ‘the Great Outdoors’.

**Stats on accessibility** - only around 1% of summer mountain leaders and rock-climbing instructors in the UK from ethnic minorities and only 1% of visitors to UK national parks come from non-white backgrounds (see Natural England, n.d.; Parveen, 2020; Booth, 2019). In the USA - Surveys of National Parks show less than 2% of visitors are African Americans (Scott and Lee, 2018). Still, this doesn’t mean we ‘should’ get ‘all’ varieties of people to visit them – after all, many first nations peoples are still not allowed back in to live and hunt on their ancestral homes, even they were the keystone species (not just wolves...who ‘have’ been allowed back in to Yellowstone, for example – it seems some animals are more equal than others).

Naomi Humphrey (2020), from the National Health Foundation states, ‘In better understanding the intersection of racism, policy, segregation, and access, one can argue that outdoor and recreational activities in general, have traditionally served white communities. A combination of economic inequality, legalized segregation, and other forms of historical and present-day overt/covert racial violence has perpetuated a diversity gap in the outdoors [...] Another systemic component of what makes outdoor spaces inaccessible to [many] communities is the white-washing of history and land ownership.’ (n.p.). Even in the UK, black history is often omitted. In the script, *Black Men Walking*, it tells of the black African Roman emperor Septimus Severus passing through Yorkshire in 200 AD. His son made Ebocoram – York, the capital of the North of England – it was an African who put the York in Yorkshire! (Testament, 2018). Black people were walking the great outdoors in England’s ‘green and pleasant land’ before the Anglo-Saxons arrived, yet, they are mostly still excluded in the white landscapes that the BBC Countryfile programme investigated recently (that had a racist backlash on Twitter).

Robert Bullard says, ‘There’s a kind of denial and disbelief in it — There are still people who think you can see all races in the same way when we talk about the environment, but it’s simply not the case [...] It’s important to converge in how we redefine the ‘environment’ (Reid, 2018).

**Intersectional environmentalism** is a term established by environmentalist Leah Thomas to explain the connection between marginalized communities and the issues facing the sustainability of our natural environment.

The conservation work of men like Muir, Roosevelt, Wilson, and others of that era are lauded still today. They helped to create our national parks, protect animal species, and establish spending time in the outdoors as a form of recreation. But it’s important to note that their work was done to protect those spaces specifically for people just like them, upper-middle-class and aristocratic whites.

In 1987, the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice published an influential report that found that hazardous waste facilities were disproportionately located in minority communities, and called this unequal vulnerability "a form of racism." The environmental movement, the report observed, "has historically been white middle and upper-class." (The New Yorker)

Historically, people of color have also had less access to the outdoors, whether it be a lack of green spaces in urban neighborhoods to feeling unwelcome or unsafe in typical outdoor recreation areas. Like much of the United States, the outdoors were segregated or off limits to people of color, including swimming pools, beaches, parks, and even our National Parks. Even though the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 removed tangible restrictions, the tensions, emotions and unseen barriers to the outdoors for people of color still exist today.

The bottom line, fighting for the environment means something completely different to people of color. The traditional environmental movement fights for the preservation of land, air and water, but the fight doesn't serve all people equally.

Instead of saviorism ("How can I save these people?"), being an intersectional advocate asks, "How can I use my privilege to amplify the work already being done?" If we truly want to protect our natural environment, we have to break down the barriers to spending time in the outdoors for all people. (Leah Thomas, cited in Wesche, 2019) (Also, see: Thomas, 2020; Walton, 2018)

In conclusion, we can't do this in a way that has been tried many times, the 'giving' 'all' people access – there's power and privilege in this – I think we need to dig deeper, to the structural racism, classism and sexism that is inherent in our society – we need to talk about politics. We need to dissect the culture wars that many right-wingers are creating either in parliament or elsewhere, such as schools, councils and social media.

Cadogan states, 'Walking while black restricts the experience of walking, renders inaccessible the classic Romantic experience of walking alone' (Cadogan, 2016, n.p.). The complexities of historical and intersectional experiences, and advocacy for/of being black in 'nature' are beginning to be explored in novel ways, for instance through the hashtag #blackinnature and through contemporary performances such as *Black Men Walking* (directed by Dawn Walton) (Mcphie & Clarke, forthcoming<sup>a</sup>).

Rhiane Fatinikun, founder of Black Girls Hike, states, "Many people grow up in cities where they experience racism on a daily basis so it feels uncomfortable to them to head out into the countryside – the last bastions of whiteness – where it is even less diverse. It is also important that those leading these hikes and activities are from a diverse background; that will stop making people feel like the countryside is not for them." (cited in Parveen, 2020).

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