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Walking on the Margin: A Study of Marginalised Ethnic Groups and Their Walking Practices in Urban and Rural Britain

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Introduction

In 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', feminist writer bell hooks outlines the 'space of marginality' as a space that she can unlock as a Black woman living and working in the United States. She speaks of racial segregation and being an outsider in a place where there is white supremacy. Having grown up in a small Kentucky town, she lived literally on the margins, needing to cross the railroad tracks to enter the "centre" where the black population worked as taxi drivers, bar staff, and maids. These people physically entered the "centre" but were socially detached from it. Although we do not experience this exact geographical phenomenon in twenty-first-century Britain, there are metaphorical margins that are still embedded within access to education, healthcare, jobs and wealth. This marginality is a position in society.

hooks seizes this space of marginality as one of 'radical possibility' and opportunity.[2] She claims that 'living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the centre as well as the margin. We understood both'.[3] Whilst hooks speaks of the 'margin', Black feminist academic Patricia Hill Collins describes marginalised individuals using the oxymoronic status as 'outsiders within', claiming that they have made 'creative use of their marginality' to produce

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unique Black feminist thought.[4] Both hooks and Collins argue for the positive nature of sitting on a 'margin' or 'border'.

It can be argued that individuals on the margin allude to Georg Simmel's social theory of The Stranger, a figure that embodies a sense of objectivity that allows them to be 'near and far at the same time.'[5] This figure is said to have a wandering nature, the opposite of fixation, giving them a helpful insight to social scenarios.[6] Another figure that communicates this action of physically wandering or strolling, particularly in an urban environment, is the flâneur. The flâneur, translating to "stroller" or "loafer" in French, was introduced by nineteenth-century poet, Charles Baudelaire, to describe a figure, typically a white male, roaming the streets and taking on the role of an urban observer completely unnoticed. I speculate whether individuals on the margin could obtain this flâneur status, exploring their variance in physical and metaphorical visibility in both geographic and social senses. These wandering figures of society can float through the centre invisible and are able to offer different and unique perspectives having seen both margin and centre.

Marginality is typically seen, as hooks states it, as a 'site of deprivation' and can be viewed as a place of repression rather than resistance, robbing these individuals of the same opportunities offered to their white counterparts.[7] However, writes hooks, 'It is a space I choose', a place of uniqueness and creative thought. Collins discusses in later writing the 'marketplace ideology' within organisations arguing that 'the commodification of outsider-within status where an African American's value to an organisation lies solely in their ability to market a seemingly permanent marginal status can operate to suppress Black women's empowerment' substituting for systemic change.[8] The 'outsider-within' status results in these figures being "othered". Their othered or unbiased position for solving centred people's problems, as Simmel suggests, can cause their own personal experiences to become invalid and distant from the centre. It is important to recognise that the very fact that marginality exists is an example of oppression towards certain groups and the gains from a marginal intellectuality can delay anti-racist or feminist social advancements. Through this argument, I recognise the dangers of romanticising marginality. However, in this study I present ways in which marginality has been utilised by individuals to create unique and creative practices worth embedding within our centres of knowledge.

Positioning has been important to my study. Employing feminist academic Donna Haraway's notion of 'situated knowledges' that clearly originate from a 'marked body', I utilise my subjectivity and my experiences as an object of study, recognising their advantages but also their limitations.[9] As a Brown woman of South Asian descent writing an academic essay, I question my authority to speak for others. I recognise the damaging effect of adopting the term BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) which has

1 bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', in *Gender Space Architecture*, ed. Jane Rendell, Barbara Penner, Iain Borden, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2003), p. 205.

2 hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', p. 206.

3 bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 15.

4 Patricia Hill Collins, 'Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought', *Social Problems*, 33.6, (1986), S14 - S32 (p. S14).

5 Georg Simmel, 'Chapter 3: The Stranger', in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. by Kurt Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 408.

6 Simmel, 'Chapter 3: The Stranger', p. 402.

7 hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', p. 206.

8 Patricia Hill Collins, 'Reflections on the Outsider Within', *Journal Of Career Development*, 26.1, (1999), 85-88 (p. 88); Patricia Hill Collins, 'Towards a Politics of Empowerment', in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York and London: Routledge: Taylor and Francis, 2000), p. 283.

9 Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Priviledge of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (1988), 575-599 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066> (p.589).

become overused in British academic institutions. Grouping together the experiences of different ethnic groups can homogenise, and the rejection of the fact that different groups experience different types of discrimination has caused a modern-day colonising effect. My personal experiences stem from the South Asian experience due to my Gujarati heritage. I do also speak of the Black experience, but I cannot speak for it. Therefore, I have decided to use the term "marginalised ethnic groups" to describe individuals who have been marginalised on the grounds of ethnicity and use "the Black experience" or "the South Asian experience" to describe specific examples.

I overlay hooks' geographical model of margin and centre across onto rural and urban Britain, developing an analysis of the ways in which marginalised ethnic groups walk in rural and urban settings.

The first chapter, 'Centre', explores the ways in which marginalised ethnic groups walk in the urban realm. Through several examples – including Monica Ali's character of Nazneen in Brick Lane, Steve McQueen's depiction of the 1970 Mangrove Nine protest in his BBC Series Small Axe and the non profit organisation Southall Black Sisters – I ask the following questions: How do methods of urban walking adopted by marginalised ethnic groups challenge specific stereotypes of walking the city? How do marginalised ethnic groups use urban walking as a practice to make visible their problems?

The second chapter, 'Margin', focuses on the ways that marginalised ethnic bodies walk the British landscape. Looking at several examples including the nineteenth century history of The Sierra Club, Ingrid Pollard's photography and Zahra Mahmood's spiritual walking, I ask: How do marginalised ethnic groups navigate themselves, through the practice of walking, in the rural environment? How does walking in rural spaces hold a political scope?

Walking, as an activity that is underpinned by issues of culture, race and gender, is the practice I use to describe, challenge and draw parallels between the binaries at work in our cities: margin/centre, urban/rural and personal/political. Using Haraway's 'situated knowledge' I assess these binary oppositions by realising the value of individual experience rather than generalising and basing arguments on the stereotypes that maintain certain assumptions about marginalised ethnic groups in Britain.[10] For example, I argue that, due to historical exclusion, for marginalised ethnic groups walking in rural spaces can be more political than protest walking, despite assumptions. I propose a vision distant from the white male gaze, depicting a position in which Britain's diverse communities are not only respected but celebrated for the differences they have to offer. Through my argument the margins must become the centre.

10 Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p. 584.

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Centre

Britain's marginalised ethnic groups tend to be concentrated in clusters in cities. The ethnic groups most likely to live in an urban location are Pakistani (99.1%), Bangladeshi (98.7%) and Black African (98.2%).[11] However, at a more granular level, from neighbourhood to neighbourhood some London boroughs are more diverse than others.[12] Migrant populations often live densely in the city, recreating elements of their home countries in urban environments, that is creating their own centres.

Monica Ali, in her novel Brick Lane, writes Nazneen's story following a young Bangladeshi woman who moves to London in 1985. Nazneen claims that if she 'wore trousers and underwear, like the girl with the big camera on Brick Lane, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud.' She has the desire to rip her sari to shreds when she realises that it is 'clothes, not fate, that make her life.'[13] Despite it being an important part of her cultural identity, Nazneen feels shackled by her sari, which visually codes her as an outsider. The flâneur, the invisible observer of the city, is always depicted as a white cis able-bodied man leisurely strolling through Paris. Nazneen, however, with her traditional clothing and her identity as a brown woman, lacks the privilege of invisibility when she walks the city. The constant possibility of harassment is imminent as women can never fully escape into invisibility because their gender and – in Nazneen's case – ethnicity marks them as objects of the male gaze.[14] The visibility of these individuals is a way that they still feel they are walking on the margin even if it is physically through the centre.

Walter Benjamin in his major work The Arcades Project concludes that 'the flâneur was male, of some means, of a refined sensibility, with little or no domestic life'.[15] This lack of domestic life and responsibility does not correlate with Nazneen's life in Brick Lane; she walks with purpose, leaving her home to buy groceries or for her children's hospital appointments. Ali describes Nazneen's bus journey with her baby, where she 'stood Raqib up on her knee so he could look out of the window with her', her observational practice devoted to her care of the baby.[16] Purpose and responsibility have always been a hindering factor to a flâneur's status. However, I argue that Nazneen's observations have a dual dimensional quality as she dictates Raqib's sight of vision and safety – this only enhances her observations of the city. This lack of realisation of mothers' observational practice shows how motherhood is completely excluded from the centred narrative of urban living.

In Brick Lane, Nazneen ventures out into the city to escape the four walls of her flat. Like Virginia Woolf in her 1930 essay 'Street Hauntings: A London Adventure' describing a narrator desperate to escape her room and challenge the mind's eye, Ali adopts a stream of consciousness narrative, describing both the city and passersby at the same time, illustrating the

11 GOV UK, Regional Ethnic Diversity, (1 August 2018) <\https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest> [accessed 2 December 2020].

12 Ben Walker, 'Britain's diversity is much more complex than it seems', *NewStatesman*, 25 June 2020, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2020/06/britains-diversity-much-more-complex-it-seems> [accessed 15 December 2020].

13 Monica Ali, *Brick Lane* (London: Black Swan, 2003), p. 100.

14 Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible Flaneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 3 (1985), p. 37-46.

15 Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust* (London, Granta 2002), p. 199.

16 Ali, *Brick Lane*, p. 100.

pace at which the narrator moves through the streets and attaining the dreamlike quality that often resonates in one's mind. Nazneen escaping where she lives in the 'eerily quiet ghettoised council estate that looms tall like chunky limbs on splinter streets' highlights her position in the margins and the hidden parts of Brick Lane, away from the touristic and famously presented centred version of the area.[17]

Ali describes how many Bangladeshis 'recreate their villages' from back home and suffer from an illusionary 'Going Home Syndrome' believing they will one day make enough money to travel back to Bangladesh.[18] She successfully paints Nazneen's feelings of un-belonging and longing for her home in Dhaka by the way that she walks the city. Ali's erratic imagery is often focussed on Nazneen's actions, feelings or mind's eye rather than her surroundings, illustrating the pace at which she runs through the streets. She never describes the physical qualities of Brick Lane, suggesting that Nazneen is very much caught up in her own anxieties, taking her mind on "wanderings" separate from her body and her surroundings. When Nazneen becomes lost she claims how the 'buildings seemed familiar' and that 'she sensed rather than saw, because she had taken care not to notice'.[19] This indicates to the reader that she does not care to become familiar with her surroundings because, like many migrants, she believes she will one day return to Bangladesh. She rejects Brick Lane as her centre.

Situated knowledge also aims for 'the joining of partial views into a collective subject position' so it is important to address how individual migrant stories create a collective presence in a city.[20] 'Going Home Syndrome' may have led to the multicultural environment of many British cities that Sanchita Islam, a British Bangladeshi writer, claims that Ali fails to depict. The strong visualisation of cross culture ubiquitous to Brick Lane, from 'the sight of Burkha-clad women walking down the street, weighed down with their shopping' to the 'packs of Asian lads with shaved heads dripping in designer gear as they loiter and heckle', are a product of diasporic communities.[21] Brick Lane's character is not a seamless, coherent identity or a single sense of place that everyone shares and experiences.[22] It is important to realise that each individual experiences their own sense of place in an area determined by 'their routes, their favourite haunts within it, the connections they make (physically, or in memory and imagination)' and how this creates a collective identity in a place.[23]

Places are a flux of moving cultures.[24] Academic Noha Nasser adopts the concept of 'Kaleido-scapes' to examine the cultural displacement and 'changing morphology' of Southall, West London, a centre of migration for South Asians.[25] In Southall, Ali's 'Going Home Syndrome' has given way to in Indian migrants weaving into the Edwardian suburb 'local customs, extended family, and community relations of the "pind" (Indian village) and the commercial structures of the "shar" (Indian town)' where the local is intertwined with the memory of home.[26] Communities in Southall

17 Sanchita Islam, 'Monica Ali, Brick Lane', in *London Fictions*, ed. by Andrew Whitehead Jerry White (London: Five Leaves Publications and New London Editions, 2013).

18 Ali, *Brick Lane*, p. 32.

19 Ali, *Brick Lane*, p. 55.

20 Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p. 590.

21 Islam, 'Monica Ali, Brick Lane'.

22 Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense Of Place', *Marxism Today*, 1 June 1991, p.28.

23 Massey.

24 Massey, p.29.

25 Noha Nasser, 'Southall's Kaleido-scape: A study in the changing morphology of a west London suburb', *Built Environments* (1978-), 30.1, (2004), 76-103 (p. 1).

26 Nasser, 'Southall's Kaleido-scape', p. 99.

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enable the creation of communicatory platforms to re-create a connection to homelands. The formation of Des Pardes (Home and Abroad) in 1965 — the largest Punjabi language newspaper — created a network between Southall and India, breaking free from oppressive languages. Many job roles in Southall require applicants to speak either Hindi, Punjabi or Urdu fluently which is a direct act of decentring white populations and bringing marginalised groups to the centre. Claiming their 'right to the city', activist groups occupied derelict buildings: The Dominion Cinema was first used by an Afro-Caribbean Youth Group and later taken over by IWA (Indian Workers Association) for a purpose-built community centre. These centres are created as a product of displacement, longing for home, racial aggression, violence and marginalisation.

27 The emergence of my own poetry is a record of my situated experiences and supports the arguments that I make. hooks writes that 'to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body.' (bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 15.) Placing myself in the "margins" or the "gutter" of the document, my experiences, through a series of auto-ethnographic methods including poems and photographs, provide a thread to bind this body of work.

Vaisakhi[27]

I walk South Road,
Remember Vaisakhi,
I held my nani's hand,
we stood on the pavement,
First the sewadars
sweep the road,
rhythmically,
Some are barefoot,
Then the Panj Piare,
the five chosen ones,
Begin the procession,
Followed by a large lorry,
Carrying the holy scripture,
The Guru Granth Sahib Ji,
large masses of people,
Begin to follow
Young boys practice Gatkha
Spinning around with sticks
'When all else fails,
it is proper to take the sword,
in one's hand'
The sound of the Dhol
Carries through the street
Finally last I see police,
on foot,
On bike and motorcycle
Tagging along on the end
The procession ends,
with the setting up of food stalls,
Samosas and Capri suns

An alternative response to displacement and racial aggression is walking in protest. Protest can be viewed as a way of making personal problems public. The Mangrove Nine case is depicted in Steve McQueen's BBC film series Small Axe. The Mangrove was a restaurant in Notting Hill, London, which provided a centre for British Black activists to meet in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the space of eighteen months, the restaurant was raided by the police twelve times on the pretext of searching for drugs, even though none were found. On 9th August 1970, Frank Crichlow, the owner, along with other activists, decided to 'take it to the streets'.[28] Darcus defines the protest as 'self-movement' and a physical 'demonstration' of their problems and the injustices they face.[29] In the film, the calm protest of speeches leads to the crowd marching the streets to the chant "hands off — Black people" and a non-diegetic ticking crescendo starts playing. As the police descend brutally, a cacophony of screaming, exclamations of confusion, racial slurs towards the ground and the repetitive sound of breaking glass echo the raids on The Mangrove café earlier in the film and become a visualised display of the injustices being 'taken to the street' for all to see. Later in the film, the exact same crescendo is heard in the courtroom, illustrating the power of protest in making the people's problems public and centring them.

Protest, as the physical demonstration of the personal, is especially important to marginalised ethnic groups because of the fragility that surrounds the topic of racism and women's issues. Southall Black Sisters (SBS) are a non profit organisation supporting Black and Brown women who are suffering from domestic violence. They highlight the British legal system's repeated struggle to understand the cultural and race related reasons for Black and Brown women voicing their experiences of domestic violence. Audre Lorde writes of 'the transformation of silence into language and action.'[30] Evidence of SBS reclaiming language and turning it into tangible action can be seen in the protest following the event in which a woman was raped on a bus in Delhi. In Southall '150 women, children and men took to the streets' chanting "women raise your voice — freedom is our right!"[31] After the protest, 'away from the cold and with much needed hot teas and samosas, they regrouped at the offices for the speeches.'[32] SBS aims to eradicate the discomfort surrounding the topic of Black women's issues by first taking them to the streets in the form of protest and then transitioning to the courts, bringing them to the centre.

28 *Small Axe: Mangrove* dir. By Steve McQueen (BBC, 2020).

29 McQueen.

30 Audre Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action' (1977), in *Sister Outsider* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 29.

31 Women, Rise and Fight – Our March on Southall (Dec 23, 2018) <https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/news/women-rise-and-fight-our-march-on-southall/> [accessed 13 March 2021].

32 Women, Rise and Fight.

Saturday Morning

My mother drives me to my dance class,
We talk endlessly,
When we're about to park,
I rush to open my purse,
Scramble around to find my ghungroos,
Tangle and unravel,

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I run with ghungroos on my feet,
Through the car park,
The cricket boys exit the sports centre,
I feel their stares and snickers,
I stomp my feet louder,
The bells weighing my feet down,
the sound echoing,
through the car park,
Let every step I take,
reach your ears,
and rattle your bones
Hold the end of the rope,
with my toe,
Wrap it around my ankle,
Round and round,
Tightly tie it at the top,
Shutting the car door behind me

Through Ali's Nazneen we explore the ways in which a Brown woman walks the city and whether she can obtain a flâneur status. She is marked as visible through her traditional sari and the colour of her skin as she walks through the centre, but her marginal position renders her invisible to society. This is due to the centring of the white male experience of the city. However, through her marginal status, she 'offers the possibilities of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.'[33] Taking Ali's 'Going Home Syndrome', displacement can form collective identity new centres through Southall. Creating platforms of language and expression as well as claiming their 'right to the city' enables the very process of decentring whiteness and allowing opportunities for marginalised ethnic communities. In protest, marginalised ethnic groups have found the first place in which they can gain an anonymous status, in becoming at one with the crowd. As McQueen's depiction of the Mangrove Nine Protest shows, protest is a method of 'taking to the street' the situated problems of marginalised ethnic individuals in collective performance. Further, SBS looks at the depersonalisation and silence surrounding topics of race and creates a protest language and platform in which tangible action can be taken to tackle the injustices that black and brown women face. Lorde suggests that 'black women have always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalisation of racism.'[34] The practice of walking in protest, then, is the first place in which marginalised ethnic communities can become invisible in the crowd but render their problems visible in society

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33 bell hooks, 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', p. 207.

34 Audre Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action', p. 31.

Entrance at Winter Street - 26/10/20

I think those leaves were red
but they are now blush pink,
bathed in the rain.
My feet stop, I hear tapping,
droplets smacking
the top of a black bin at a door front.

I walk and I wear clothes

that any white person would wear,
but my skin is different.
Black trench coat, thick scarf.
I put on my grandmother's earrings
ones she made in the factory
to 'feel Indian' -
I am afraid of forgetting

Writing is like walking
walking is like writing.
When I am walking,
I want to sit down and write
and when I write
I want to get up and walk.

my body is a pen.

I wrote half of this in my head,
rushing to get to the bench,
the words seeping
through the soles of my feet.
I look different,
maybe I see different

I will get up and walk again

Margin

Walking the British landscape is often seen as a white middle-class activity. In a 2017 study by Natural England, it was discovered that just 26% of Black people spent time in the countryside, compared with 44.2% of white people.[35] In a different study, it was revealed that only 1% of visitors to UK national parks come from marginalised ethnic backgrounds.[36] Lack of diversity in the British countryside is strikingly

35 Gov UK, 'Visits to the natural environment' (17 May 2019) <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/culture-and-community/culture-and-heritage/visits-to-the-natural-environment/latest> [accessed 2 December 2020].

36 Nazia Parveen, 'The BAME women making the outdoors more inclusive' (2 December 2020) <https://www.

theguardian.com/travel/2020/dec/02/the-bame-women-making-the-british-outdoors-more-inclusive?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other> [accessed 2 December 2020].

37 Gov UK, 'Rural Population and Migration' (August 2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rural-population-and-migration> [accessed 16 January 2021].

38 Julien Glover, 'Landscape Report - Final Report', GOV DEFRA, June 2020, p.5; Massey, Doreen, 'A Global Sense Of Place', Marxism Today, 1 June 1991, p.29.

apparent from these statistics. Only 1.7% of the Black population and 2% of the Asian population live in the countryside.[37] Due to most minority ethnic communities residing in urban areas and UK cities, visiting and partaking in walks in the countryside comes with a multitude of difficulties, including travel costs, lack of 'cultural habit' and fear of discrimination. The countryside, where the romanticised illusion of 'British' culture still exists as the binary opposite to multicultural cities, is perhaps the 'centre' that marginalised ethnic communities still feel excluded from, with their neighbourhoods being the margins. Yet, as Julien Glover suggests 'our countryside will end up being irrelevant to the country that it represents', perhaps it is time we reframe the centre or let it evolve in parallel with the 'flux of moving cultures' that best describes twenty-first century Britain.[38] I also argue that marginalised ethnic groups, due to their positionality in society, walk and appreciate rural environments in a different way to white communities and therefore our studies of walking and environmentalism should expand further than the romantic European walker.

Elchi

We walk down from the path,
into the black marshes,
muddying our boots,
It is liberating,
to feel the soles of my feet,
travel further below than usual,
leaving hollow imprints in the ground,
It gives me a greater sense of purpose.

We maintain our direction downwards,
until we find a few logs where we sit,
My father unzips the rucksack,
pulls out a flask and some tea bags,
We proceed to make the tea,
while we chat,
Sipping the warm liquid .... 'elchi' એલચી
(Gujarati for cardamom and messenger)
I whisper the word into the cold air,
as though this one word,
not in the oppressor's language,
was my one weapon.

All around me, I feel warm,
I feel this warmth on my fingers,
and around my lips,

The wind whips through the tall leafless
trees

Marginalised ethnic communities view recreation in the countryside differently. Walking for pleasure tends to be a less popular recreational activity than, for example, eating together in a picnic outdoors. For South Asian communities like the one I have grown up in, group excursions are normal. MOSAIC Outdoors Chair and campaigner Mohammed Dhalech explains that when marginalised ethnic communities go outdoors 'they tend to come in large extended families to picnic together' and 'a lot of people go to the Lake District on summer evenings for a picnic. They want to use the environment in different ways.[39] Although walking in nature has not been common for my family, walking in groups, eating, playing card games, badminton or cricket and talking amidst the rural landscape are activities we have carried out in Britain for years. Solitary walking through the countryside is less popular than visiting in larger groups as groups ensure anonymity and safety in numbers to gain some level of invisibility. Marginalised ethnic groups often feel outnumbered in rural areas of Britain as 'white supremacists seem to arise from or flock to some of the most scenic parts of the country.'[40] Evelyn C. White writes that when she first tried to explore rural Oregon, memories of southern lynching 'could leave me speechless and paralyzed with the heart stopping fear that swept over me as I crossed paths with loggers near the McKenzie River or whenever I visited the outdoors' illustrating the fear that marginalised ethnic groups feel in the countryside.[42]

Poppy Noor, British columnist for The Guardian, argues that being Black in nature means feeling like an 'endangered species', highlighting the links between race, environmentalism and conservation.[42] In the nineteenth century many walking clubs were formed as the Romantic interest grew. The Sierra Club was founded in 1892 by a group of Californians who were interested in wilderness walks in the mountain ranges of the Pacific Coast. Other clubs were also formed during this period, including the Alpines Club of English mountaineers. However, The Sierra Club was different due to its interest in the forest and natural features as a 'political interest' and their efforts to keep the natural landscape 'untransformed.'[43] They became an activist walking group walking and fighting to preserve the landscape which was being exploited for economic gains. John Muir, founder of The Sierra Club, used evocative and spiritual language as an effort to portray Yosemite as a sacred place and reveal a divine beauty that was embedded within nature. However, Black and indigenous people did not fit in his framing of beauty: 'The Indians he saw on trails struck him as filthy' and he 'spoke of Negroes as largely lazy and easy-going and unable to pick as much cotton as a white man.'[44] Gifford Pinchot, the chief of the forest service during Roosevelt's presidency, argued for eugenics and the sterilization of Black and indigenous people in his three volumed 'National Conservation Commission'.[45] The approach to conservation of natural beauty translated almost directly into the conservation of (white) beauty in humans. This conservation of beauty in both the British landscape and

39 The Great Outdoors, BLACK GIRLS HIKING: HOW THE OUTDOORS IS BECOMING MORE DIVERSE (6th February 2020) <https://www.tgomagazine.co.uk/news/black-girls-hiking-how-the-outdoors-is-becoming-more-diverse/> [accessed 4 January 2021].

40 Rebecca Solnit, Wanderlust, (London, Granta 2002), p. 244.

41 Solnit, Wanderlust, p. 244.

42 Poppy Noor, 'Being black while in nature: 'You're an endangered species', *The Guardian*, 31 May 2020

43 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 102

44 Christopher Carter, 'Blood in the Soil: The Racial, Racist, and Religious Dimensions of Environmentalism', in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Nature*, ed. by Hobgood Laura, Bauman Whitney (Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 50.

45 Carter, 'Blood in the Soil', p. 50.

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population can explain why many marginalised ethnic individuals do not feel that they belong in the rolling picturesque of the Lake District.

I put my foot down
on the forest bed,
instead of hearing,
the leaves crunch,
I hear the word 'imposter',

Ingrid Pollard, British artist and photographer, explores such constructs of race and 'Britishness' through portraiture and landscapes. She investigates the states of belonging and un-belonging in particular landscapes.[46] With the rise of industrialisation in the nineteenth century, writers and poets took comfort in the unexplored landscapes of Britain. This phenomenon created the traditional representation of Britain to be that of 'an idealised rural landscape, the rolling green hills, the farm in the valley, and the sun setting over the wheat fields. The binary opposite lies within the city and its traffic, smoking chimneys, teeming hordes, that are constantly encroaching on the countryside.'[47] Pollard's work in her series Pastoral Interlude (1988) aims to deconstruct these polarities through the exploration of place, being and British identity in the Black British community. This sense of place has been dictated by deep rooted issues concerning land ownership, economic and industrial development as well as Britain's involvement in the Atlantic Slave Trade creating 'the Romantic Countryside idyll'.[48] She maintains a romantic, picturesque and post-card-like quality alluding to William Wordsworth's "wanderings", but the Black figures, accompanied with words describing feelings of exclusion, create unease. British art historian, Anna Arabindan-Kesson, describes how 'Pollard's Black subjects move through the landscape, in an ambivalent space, revealing themselves to be, like tourists or travellers, not quite at home'.[49] Through her work, Pollard perfectly visually represents how marginalised ethnic groups feel in the British landscape and she claims that 'nature romanticism is not available to people of her colour' as they do not fit in the centred vision of the Pastoral that is so embedded within British culture.[50]

46 Ingrid Pollard, 2020. *Belonging & Un-belonging in the English Countryside* (6): Ingrid Pollard. [video]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m72p59wCnJM> [Accessed 3 March 2021].

47 Pollard.

48 Pollard.

49 Anna Arabindan-Kesson, 'Landscape, Interrupted: Ingrid Pollard and the Diasporic Imagination', unpublished, paper in conference of International Conference: Photography and Britishness (Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven, November 4-5, 2016).

50 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 244.

"What is this you have taken me to?!
All I see here is dust and stones!"
'Bus aya to dhoor ne dhefaj che!'
અહીંયા તો ધૂળ ને ઢેફાં જ છે.,
My great grandmother,
used to exclaim,
Followed by laughter.
Whenever taken out of the city,
And into the nothingness
Of the country,
We all laugh and exclaim,
"Dhoor ne defa!" (dust and stones)

We are dust and stones.

Dhoor ne dhefa
ધૂળ ને ઢેફાં.

Although rural Britain is portrayed as a romantic and pastoral illusion, for example through its depiction in poetry and literature, rural land in Britain is not exempt from colonial connections to the Atlantic Slave Trade. Corinne Fowler, in her work Green Unpleasant Land, recognises 'the pastoral's role in constructing consoling mythologies of Englishness.' With rapid industrialisation taking place in British cities during the nineteenth century, the rural provided a safe place and 'site of Englishness.'[52] Rural belonging and identity are explored by Romantic poets and writers such as Wordsworth, who wandered into the hills and moors and described the landscapes using common but lyrical language. However, despite many rural poems and literature being published at the height of the Empire, they fail to allude to the colonial links of the British landscape. New farming methods and industrial developments were taking place to allow wealthy tourists to visit rural Britain, and many of the roads that paved the way to the Wye Valley, the setting for Wordsworth's poem 'Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey,' were paid for by slave-produced wealth.[53] Many gardens, as a part of wealthy estates, also had hidden colonial connections. Fanny Price's appreciation of the gardens in Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, describing it as 'soothing and lovely,' overlooks the Antiguan Slave Trade that funds the grounds of the estate.[54] The illusionary pastoral carefully hides the lines which trace rural land back to slave links. Although it appears that marginalised ethnic individuals are not in the centred vision of the pastoral, they are very much embedded in the history of what makes rural Britain the way it is today.

Previously the sites of rural Britain were accessible mainly to the gentrified classes. However, during the early twentieth century, solitary walking and ramblings began to appeal to marginalised individuals of society when the benefits of the outdoors to health and wellbeing were

51 Corinne Fowler, *Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Rural England's Colonial Connections* (Leeds, Peepal Tree 2020), p. 52.

52 Fowler.

53 Fowler, p. 76.

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discovered. On 24th April 1932, around 400 people defied the law and trespassed from Manchester to Sheffield, over the hills and moorlands, to meet at the plateau of Kinder Scout, Derbyshire. The protest walk was organised by the BWSF (British Workers' Sports Federation), which was becoming increasingly popular with young mill workers from Manchester and surrounding cities. Walking in protest is not limited to urban environments: BWSF member, Benny Rothman, recalls the walk and describes the 'hundreds of lads and girls, in their picturesque rambling gear: shorts of every length and colour, flannels and breeches, vivid colours and drab khaki' who broke through and ran through prohibited land to Kinder Plateau. After his arrest, he explains how 'ramblers, after a hard week's work, in smoky towns and cities, go rambling for relation and fresh air.'[55] Rural Britain provided an escape to the overcrowded and polluted cities of the twentieth century industrial revolution. The Mass Trespass Protest fuelled the 'Right to Roam' Movement which eventually led to the creation of National Parks in Britain, with the Peak District being the first. With increasing awareness of the benefits of the outdoors to physical and mental health, this raises the question of why rambling or solitary walking in the outdoors is so uncommon amongst marginalised ethnic communities. Their marginal position in rural Britain has impacted their susceptibility to health conditions, such as asthma, heart disease, and vitamin D deficiency, that could otherwise be prevented through walks and exposure to the outdoors.

Walking and the outdoors are not new to marginalised ethnic communities. Many immigrants of marginalised ethnicity come from rural areas. Displacement and diaspora include walking through rural environments. Black people on foot have appeared in many significant moments throughout history, from death walks through to West Africa to reach slave ships to the American civil rights marches in the 1960s. Marginalised ethnic individuals are not new to rural Britain either. The Runaway Slaves Project at the University of Glasgow has records of escaped slaves in Britain proving the existence of Black and South Asian presence in rural Britain as early as the eighteenth century. Corrine Fowler describes the hunting of a runaway slave who escapes into the Yorkshire moors and how 'he is not the first to flee along this riverbank, to lumber through these bars of beech.'[56] The historical presence of Black and South Asian people in rural Britain paints a picture of chaos and violence: a part of British rural history that has been pushed back to the margins.

It is only in recent years that marginalised ethnic communities have ventured out into rural Britain as ramblers and solitary walkers. Modern day immigrant lifestyles in Britain echo the nomadic patterns of rural movement, 'never still, working second, third, and fourth jobs.'[57] Poet, critic, and journalist Bridget Minamore explains that this constant movement is 'why hill-walking felt so at odds with her blackness at first: this walking without purpose.'[58] However, Ghanaian journalist Maxwell

55 Benny Rothman, The Mass Trespass <https://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/learning-about/news/70-years-of-the-peak-district-national-park/the-mass-trespass> [accessed 6 October 2021].56 Fowler, *Green Unpleasant Land*, p. 295.

57 Bridget Minamore, *Black Men Walking: a hilly hike through 500 years of black British history* (23rd January 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/jan/23/black-men-walking-royal-exchange-manchester-testament> [accessed 6 October 2021].

58 Minamore.

Ayamba highlights that there is a purpose to rambling and solitary walking. Research suggests that African-Caribbean men are more likely to experience mental illness. As a result, Ayamba co-founded 100 Black Men Walk for Health in 2004 to bring awareness to the Black community of the benefits of walking to physical and mental wellbeing. Furthermore, rapper and playwright Testament, in his play Black Men Walking, ties together a Black men's walking group in Sheffield with over five hundred years of Black British history.[59] Every first Saturday of the month, a group of Black men from Sheffield meet at 9.30am sharp to begin a hike in the Peak District. They walk and talk about relationships, jobs, families, politics, religion and fatherhood. The play features three Black men singing a choral chant from their ancestors: 'We walk out our identity. We walk for sanctuary. We walk to claim this land. Though we are written into the landscape you don't see us. We walked England before the English.'[60] This chant alludes to Fowler's concept of the 'Postcolonial Pastoral': a 'medium for painful cultural memory rather than comforting cultural myth,' suggesting that communicating with nature and its history brings healing and awakening.[61] Minamore explains how 'walking is a reclamation', reminding herself that 'this is a land she can take your time with; these peaks are safe, she won't need to run.'[62] With this deep rooted history of identity and belonging, for marginalised ethnic groups walking through rural Britain is an entirely different entity to that of the centred white experience.

Different patterns of use and appreciation of the countryside, along with a lack of culturally appropriate provisions, are possible factors of the lack of marginalised ethnic communities visiting the countryside. Rural Britain is less diverse and so marginalised ethnic groups experience an amplified feeling of otherness and un-belonging due to physical visibility. Feeling so visibly exposed in the cultural centre which is within rural Britain, they are pushed back to the margins. The political history of The Sierra Club outlining efforts to translate natural beauty to the idealised beauty of the human population has led to a deeper-rooted feeling of exclusion in rural Britain for marginalised ethnic communities. Furthermore, 'walking is practised and experienced in innumerable contexts, and so generalisations are problematic' revealing the limitations of traditional walking stereotypes.[63] The construction of the illusionary pastoral of the British countryside, in Romantic poetry and literature, has pushed away historical narratives of Black and South Asian presence in rural Britain. With the complex and painful history of slave roots and Empire, the practice of walking through the British rural as a marginalised ethnic individual offers an experience of a different dimension: of healing, remembrance and identity. Marginalised ethnic communities show that the practice of walking itself can also be experienced in a multitude of ways different to the traditional or European romantic stereotype of 'the strolling narrator' or 'the nomadic pedlar.'[64]

59 Minamore.

60 Testament, *Black Men Walking*, (London, Oberon Books 2018), p. xvi.

61 Fowler, *Green Unpleasant Land*, p. 295

62 Minamore, *Black Men Walking: a hilly hike through 500 years of black British history*.

63 Tim Edensor, 'Walking in rhythms: place, regulation, style and the flow of experience', *Visual Studies*, 25.1, (April 2020), 69-79 (p. 69).

64 Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 113.

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The Margins Must Become the Centre

In academia, we are taught to not stray too far out into the margins and our research must anchor back to centred knowledge. Haraway talks of 'reductionism' in which 'science is about a search for translation, convertibility, mobility of meanings, and universality, where one language must be enforced as the standard for all the translations and conversions'.[65] In the same way, we have created a common language in which we discuss walking. All modes of city walking must reference the European trope of the flâneur and rural walking must relate to Wordsworth's romantic wanderings. However, walking cannot be reduced to any universality. Walking with its rhythmic pace and metronomic nature allows 'something new and unforeseen that introduces itself into the repetitiveness: difference' and 'despite the many traditions of walking – the landscape walker, the walking poet, the pilgrim – it is always possible to walk in new ways.'[66] With the act of walking practised by most of the population, the practice can be stylised allowing us to identify and celebrate certain cultural and social differences outside of centred examples.

As Lorde has repeatedly said, academics refuse to teach the experiences of marginalised ethnic individuals as their situated problems are "too different" and too far from the centre. 'Institutional rejection of difference' is what has caused marginalised ethnic groups to become the other: 'the outsider whose experience and tradition is too 'alien' to comprehend'.[67] Lorde further describes it as 'academic arrogance' to deny the 'creative function of difference' and recognize it as a 'crucial strength' in feminist and anti-racist practice.[68] Through the recognition of difference we can widen our knowledge, expand our centres and learn from the creativity and uniqueness that marginality can offer.

Through the thread that I follow in the form of poetry, photographs and self-actualisation, I discover what Lorde describes as 'places of possibility within ourselves' which hold 'an incredible reserve of creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling.'[69] Having spent my academic life in the 'European mode of living', I have come to the realisation that 'survival is not an academic skill' but a process of delving into the 'place of power within which is neither white nor surface; it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep.'[70] Just as Lorde states 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house', I know that the key to feminist and anti-racist social advancements does not lie in the academic institutions that have been built by our oppressors, but within myself and the poetry I write.[71]

Through the study of walking, I have realised that the margins are so far from the centre; geographically, with marginalised ethnic groups experiencing starkly different phenomena in both realms, but also

65 Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p.580.

66 Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time and everyday life*, translated by S. Elden and G. Moore. (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 6; Sean O'Hagan, 'Walking in rhythms: place, regulation, style and the flow of experience', *Visual Studies*, 25.1, (April 2020), 69-79 (p. 75).

67 Audre Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference' (1980), in *Sister Outsider* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 108-110.

68 Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House' (1979), in *Sister Outsider* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 105. 69

69 Audre Lorde, 'Poetry Is Not a Luxury' (1977), in *Sister Outsider* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 25.

70 Lorde, p. 26; Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', p. 105.

71 Lorde, *The Master's Tools*.

metaphorically, with these groups sitting in the margins of society, far from the centre. And so, the margins must become the centre.

All images: Photograph of author by Owais Abid (Photo: by permission Owais Abid, 14.12.2021).

Biography:

Aayushi Bajwala is a recent graduate from the Sheffield School of Architecture and a freelance writer and artist with a focus on social topography and borders. During her time at the University of Sheffield she was involved in the EDI Committee and was a key member of the EDI Student Action Group, holding talks and discussions. She was also a key participant in the podcast 'Off the Drawing Board: Call to Action: Anti-Racism at SSoA.' Since graduating, she has been involved in outreach programmes working to make the architectural profession more accessible to marginalised people in the UK. Working on a project called 'Playful Prototypes' funded by Barnet Artsdepot, she has been helping lead school workshops based on sustainability and creative reuse alongside architects from Studio Polpo and Architype. Now she is working in Lisbon as an Architectural Assistant Intern at Darq2 Arquitetura/Design.

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