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Book Review

The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us. Written by Nick Hayes
Bloomsbury Circus, 2020.
Reviewed by Sachindev P. S.[i]

Each chapter in *The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us* is about an illicit journey, a night camp out in the wild, or a subtle trespass of a place that is legally inaccessible to the public. Published in August 2020, the book has received encouraging reviews from *The Guardian, New Statesman, Times Literary Supplement*, and also featured on *The Sunday Times Bestsellers* list. Furnished in a collectible hardback, the book contains sketches by the Nick Hayes who is also a graphic artist. Hayes is in search of a calm spot to sit and sketch, ventures into land politics by the sheer virtue of curiosity, and emerges with some disturbing revelations about land practices in England since the 12th century. He calls this shape-shifting trend of land appropriation "the cult of exclusion." Through a range of topics such as hunting, the protestant history in England, the travels of Romas, slavery, and East Indian Company men's rise to parliament, Hayes exposes how the public has lost their right to the land over the centuries. Hayes interjects his exploration of an aspect of the exercise of power with his intimate encounters with landscapes he is trespassing himself. His relationship with the outdoors begins with the names of the chapters of the book. Each chapter is named after an animal that has a role in the chapter. Hayes's humour extends to his descriptions of the activities of these animals and his understanding of them is marked with a sense of mutual respect. Describing the landscape with poetic dexterity, he establishes that the current model of land ownership is the root of social inequality that grips the UK.

Great Britain, the largest colonising state ruled over thirteen colonies at a time. The East India Company, and subsequently the Crown, plundered the land, tortured people, exploited resources, and stole the wealth from these countries. The volume eloquently discusses the stories of the common people, who were the residents of Britain, the colonising country, before, after and during colonialism. Centring on the land, the book is an engaging read interspersed with spectacular chiaroscuro sketches bringing to the reader's attention

diverse issues that should concern every citizen of the UK deeply, and as for the rest of the readers, the book will change the way they look at land ownership. The book provides an intriguing post-colonial ecocritical point of view, because it connects colonialism and land appropriation, and secondly, it offers an activism-oriented environmentalist approach.

The reader follows Hayes on his forays into the pastures and valleys while listening to his account of the history of the land, in the process learning why he had to stop short of entering a landholding or why there is still a pathway open for public. Hayes goes into the Boughton House, Arundel Castle, Highclere Castle, and such vast expanses of private properties. He refuses to be confined, though he is often confronted by angry land owners or their guards. He exposes the malicious land practices since AD1235, which enables the upper class to gain and expand their control over the land and its ecosystems, leaving the life that existed freely in peril. Hayes writes, "the real question is why we allow ourselves to be fenced off in this way. Why do we obey the command of signs and the limits to our freedom silently scrawled across the land in lines of barbed wire? Where does this obedience come from?" (Hayes 91, 92). He answers this question in the latter part of the book when he talks about the Berlin Wall. He writes, "Following the fall of the 101-mile-long Berlin Wall, the Germans began speaking about a *Mauer im Kopf*, a wall in the head, a 'mind wall'. Without the actual presence of the wall, it was still perceived by the residents of Berlin, like a phantom limb, it continued to trigger the brain." (Hayes 97) Hayes not only breaks the barriers of the unreasonably vast, now privatised lands but also calls out the wealthy owners such as the notorious millionaire Nicholas Van Hoogstraten who using their power and influence have obstructed free movement. By recounting the little-known protests against these privileged figures, Hayes provides a centuries-long thread of land revolts and builds a case against the sacredness of private land ownership. Inspired by the environmentalist and the founder of the wild-swimming movement Roger Deakin, Hayes attempts to legitimize loitering and pursues "The Right of Way" fervently. Hayes's only crime is searching for places he can sit and peacefully draw his sketches which he says is a way of legitimising loitering, and thus, a political act.

Hayes elaborates on how colonialism created new landowners in England. The men of East India Company came with wealth from India, and they acquired vast expanse of land in and around London so much so Berkshire was at a time called the "English Hindoostan." He writes, "these were (Men of the East India Company) self-made businessmen who stormed

into the English landscape like lottery winners, Indian gems hanging from their wive's necks, swishing through the halls of Westminster in Indian Silk Coats, buttoned with pearls." (Hayes 145) The writer represents and proclaims his solidarity with those who suffered this consequence and identifies himself as a victim of this particular act of colonialism. The book systematically breaks down colonial/capitalist/nobility based environmental practices in the land of the coloniser, explicating the roles of several players including the judiciary, politicians, and clergy. Establishing that rampant land-grabbing that continued through centuries has shaped and reshaped the way the current population experiences their environment and identifying colonialism as a funding mechanism to this exploitative trend is something that the author has achieved.

Colonialism generated money which was used to further the land appropriation in England and helped oppress the common people. Nick Hayes elaborates on the many revolts and protests, some extremely violent, that occurred in the history of England from the time of William the Conqueror through the period of Empire. The enclosures of the 16th century (illegal enclosures and depopulation of the land for sheep farming) was in effect an internal colonialism – large scale occupation of land by those in power, stripping the natives of their rights and land. Hayes notes, "In Rockingham Forest alone, 27,000 acres had been enclosed, 350 farms destroyed and almost 150,000 people across eighteen villages lost their homes." (Hayes 113) These acts led to oppression of identity and dehumanization of people as they were left without their livelihood and dignity, both dependent on the land that they previously were free to live on. The Midland Revolts which started in 1607 were against these enclosures and culminated in the Newton Rebellion which was one of the last times the common people and the gentry engaged in open conflict. By the time Britain became a colonial power, land grabbing had assumed more legitimacy evident in the case of Berkshire. The riches obtained through colonisation remain in the control of the billionaires and the Crown, and private ownership of land is normalised to such an extent that people no longer were complaining even when the 'right of way' is obstructed. This book aims to sensitise the public, and make the reader aware of this complacency.

Hayes is lamenting the loss of freedom to experience nature throughout the book. To experience the outdoors first-hand, without the suspicious looks, the apprehension of being 'caught' and 'criminalised' by the landowner and law respectively, is his dream. He is arguing for relaxation of laws around private property and what he is intending is responsible

venturing into nature. Thus, it can be said that it is the idea of conservation in the tradition of John Muir, The Father of the National Parks, that underpins Hayes's activism but, his overall argument falls short of being provocative when he calls for the awakening of the land (Hayes 386). Apart from a few occasions such as the description of the Midland Revolts, Hayes does not attempt to establish the ecological relationship that existed between the people and the land. This is another point where his observations are limited to that of a wanderer, a flaneur of nature so to say. The personal narrative of being stopped and pushed out of a landholding helps in understanding the severity of the issue of restricted access but does not put it in perspective.

Hayes is making a case for increased freedom for humans to explore the land to camp, kayak, trek, and experience the outdoor life without the restrictions that are standardized to a dangerous degree. One might wonder that eventually, he is committing the original sin, of being anthropocentric, because one of the consequences of opening up the guarded forests and rivers will be heightened tourism of which the side-effects is universally well known. Hayes's argument is however based on altruism and responsible interaction with nature that he seems to expect from people. Though Hayes and likeminded people behind activism against the criminalisation of trespass are at the risk of advancing this anthropocentric agenda, mostly out of necessity, their case does have merit. In the age of unprecedented ecological destruction, the onus of protecting the environment is upon the people rather than the government or the corporations whose nexus is largely responsible for the ecological damage around the world. One can care only if one is connected to what one is supposed to care for. The criminalisation of trespass has played a crucial role in detaching humanity from its natural environment and confined us to our brick-and-mortar private spaces. Therefore, when a hundred-year-old tree is cut down in a forest hundred miles away from your four walls, you feel nothing, and you do not act.

The book explores the politics of the land of the biggest colonial power ever to exist. This is an environmentalist looking back at how the royalty and then capitalism led to the privatization of 92% of England's land and 97% of its rivers. Britain as a global power plundered lands across the world and its effect on the lower classes of the kingdom was never better than any of those in the colonized countries though the devastation caused by the coloniser in these countries is not comparable with that of the UK. A thoroughly enjoyable

environmental read, the book changes one's idea of private ownership of land and calls for a shift of mindset. And to that end, may there be a thousand books of trespasses.

Works Cited

Hayes, Nick. *The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines that Divide Us.* Bloomsbury Circus. 2020.

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