

Heavy Burden

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One of the first things I remember noticing as a student was in the subject of learning theory. I studied ethology and the subject was about how humans and animals are shaped by the environment and society around us. How we are easily influenced so that our behavior and perception are conditioned in nature's (or the environments) most effective way. We adapt to various stimuli in order to save energy and to fit into the environment we live in, we become energy efficient.

In class, we looked, among other things, at the history of advertising and how large companies such as Coca-Cola sneaked in images of their logo during cinema films, at such a high speed that people did not register that they were there, but slowly enough that the subconscious was triggered by the logo's stimuli, and made everyone want to buy coke during the break. This was, of course, eventually banned. And we also learned that there are now all kinds of rules and guidelines on how it is legal to market products and services.

It is of course important to distinguish between information and advertising, and to distinguish between fact and fiction, or vision.

The topic for the course Living In The Landscape 2024, "Rivers and green energy" led me to a place



Figure 1. The yoke and the pillow. Image: Gullesen, 2024

in my hometown with rivers and different kinds of wetlands, but also the river delta, fields of peat and industrial development.

One peat area with a quite rare density of the plant "posh" has been filled with a massive deposit of stones. This has permanently destroyed areas of peat which is highly valuable in the climate and environment for its carbon storage and water management, not to mention its density of early pollinators that we need so dearly. It is a mystery why we allow this to happen when we also use millions of NOK

restoring peat in other areas in Norway, and in the world (Miljødirektoratet, 2020).

There are also several plans in this area to fill even more important wetlands with stone to make room for production of windmills. Along with this, our neighboring municipality is in the process of installing wind turbines on the biggest mountain between Rana and Nesna (Sjonfjellet, n.d.). The mountain is collecting and filtering water (for free!) and transferring minerals to agricultural land, water sources and into the sea. Yet, they are planning to destroy another untouched area with an extremely important role in the ecosystem.

This is a real mystery to me.

It makes me wonder who really wants to risk altering our water supply and maybe deprive us of the luxury of clean water, for temporarily “green” energy sales. Not to mention, what will these environmental changes affect our local food supply, wild and farmed, both from agriculture and from the sea.

My thoughts are streaming from the sight of visible roots from the peat that is upside down and destroyed. Thinking of the way the water digs its way to every root in various forms of streams and rivers. I think of how the narrowest of rivers are essential to every life form. Those roots are connected not only through its plant but also to other roots and plants. The water connects us all.

It feels like capitalism is blocking common knowledge, silencing nature scientists and manipulating rural districts into believing it is necessary to invest in irreversible industry. When rural districts, in fact, are more sustainable with its natural resources as they are.

Postcolonial theory can be useful for understanding local conditions in an increasingly global-

ized world and can help us understand how local communities can achieve freedom of action under capitalist power relations and global influences, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002, pp. 209–222). The theory focuses on issues such as power relations, racism, oppression, national identity and language. It also addresses how previously colonized peoples and societies can resist, negotiate, or redefine their own culture and history in a post-colonial world. For example, place has always been important in postcolonial theory, and the material and global aspects of environmental protection are gaining in importance. Environmental degradation, in particular, is one of the most devastating consequences of industrialization. There are many examples of Western (or global capitalist) exploitation of the environment, as well as of poor communities that feel dependent on foreign investment.

Modernization has led developing countries to destroy their own environments, and this also seems to apply to countries that are not considered developing countries. Destructive connections between global capital, local politicians, individuals in favorable positions, NGOs and international companies are largely ongoing (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, pp. 209–222), also in “the world’s richest country” Norway, both in environmental and in human rights (Miljødirektoratet, 2020; Sjonfjellet, n.d.; Strömngren, Nystuen, & Wille, n.d.).

It is not a simple problem, but the solution must start at the root.

How good are humans to distinguish between what is advertising and what is necessary? To what extent do we allow ourselves to be influenced by social forces at the expense of our democracy, our own independence and our resources? As a teacher and

behavioral biologist, I am interested in what tools we need to be able to display the problems we face. How should one convey the urgent message that nature conservation and local independent resource utilization is what will benefit us the most and those who come after? Is it really possible for 'little me' to reach out to those who are convinced that there must be more development and consumption?

In Ingold's *The temporality and the landscape* (1993), I reflect on his description of "the people". How the people live together and influence each other and the environment in line with their goals and values in a community. Some people are also out of step with others and their surroundings:

"Only the sleeper, oblivious to the world, is out of joint - his snores jar the senses precisely because they are not in any kind of rhythmic relation to what is going on around. Without wakeful attention, there can be no resonance."

(Ingold, 1993, p. 207)

Ingold (1993) describes how different types of people look at the world from different points of view and assumptions, and that our view of the landscape is a result of our attention and commitment, providing the basis for our thoughts and ideas about it. From my point of view, I find that many people are sleeping when they are awake.

Our attention has become numb in several areas and I think this is due to the way we live, use and perceive "our landscape/our taskscape". I find that in my taskscape there is always something or someone telling us that we must do more, we must have more, we must be more, we don't have time to "waste". We listen and follow the flow, run faster. Everyone has to reach something more, no one slows down. More people are running faster than



Figure 2. *Closed eyes on the pillow.* Image: Gulleisen, 2024

they can and we are putting the same stress on the earth's resources. Unnecessary exploitation. We're not going to last. We have nothing more to give.

"It is easy to carry knowledge", they say. But in fact, it is actually up for discussion whether energy or clean water is more important, then the burden is heavy and extremely frustrating to bear.

Not everyone sees what is happening or understands that this exploitation of people and nature is not sustainable if humans are meant to be on this planet forever. Besides, some do not care. It depends on several factors and it is unfortunately human nature in a nutshell.

Humans have evolved to become effective stewards of the local environment with a short time horizon, not regional or global, or in a long perspective. We often think that it is only the modern man who has problems with managing resources in a sustainable way. That assumption becomes too easy, we humans have done this for a long time and it is rooted in evolution (Mysterud 2003, p. 686–709). Iver Mysterud (2003) describes that our most important behavioral tendencies for resource use have been shaped through reproductive success (Low and Heinen 1993). In humans, control and short-term exploitation of resources gives status and power. Status and power have in prehistory (read: always) correlated with more viable offspring. In this process, the hypothesis is that humans in the context of resources have evolved behavioral tendencies that maximize short-term profit rather than long-term security. It is conceivable that it is these human behaviors as efficient resource, whereby users in competition with others, forms the core of the environmental problems (Mysterud, 2003, p. 715).

It is a complicated exercise to regulate natural resources and their use, but there are several solutions, and many good sources of conditions and prerequisites that are needed to succeed in resource management. Most are based on local resource management and co-determination (Heinen & Low, 1993, Mysterud, 2003). It will be measures that serve the local population here and now, with an immediate net benefit.

Just like the “Yoke”, with its handmade and carefully fitted cutout to share weight on the shoulders. The Yoken is a tool that provides instant relief to whoever uses it, and it distributes the weight favorably. It’s simple and will forever be necessary.



Figure 3. Yoke part carved for it to be easy on the shoulders. Image: Gulleesen, 2024.

An immediate advantage would be to exploit the reward system that has regulated human behavior as hunters and gatherers and would appeal to our evolutionary adaptation and natural response. This can, for example, be an offer of a job, better pay, schooling and education, access to health services and control over one’s own resources (Low and Heinen 1993, Mysterud 2003).

These are strategies that can work on environmental protection work (Mysterud 2003), but also to involve the local population in industrial development and in the utilization of local (natural) resources.

Shifting baseline syndrome (SBS) describes a phenomenon where people change their perception of what is the normal state of an environment based on their own experience. As the environment changes and gradually worsens, each new generation adapts its understanding of what is natural and right based on the current situation, not the origi-

nal and perhaps better condition. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation are not as well noticed, recognized and understood because the reference point of normal is constantly deteriorating (Alleyway et al., 2023).

I would like to point out how different the expression and symbolism of the cushion cover is with and without the hand and face print. If you turn the pillow over, it is untouched. The two sides can reflect both feelings and lack of them.

Once upon a time there lived people on this earth, who could meet wild animals that were completely fearless of us. We can meet some of them now, but it is rare. And it is rapidly diminishing because we humans are unable to control ourselves, pay attention and allow nature the space and time to give us the resources we need. It is completely hopeless to think about how much resources we actually have here on the planet, but at the same time it turns out to be so difficult to share? It is as if we stubbornly believe that it is necessary for something or someone to be oppressed, in order for us to have what we need. It is a lie, we have enough.

Too often an overwhelming frustration and anger at the world's governing powers has weighed heavily on my shoulders. Screaming into a pillow may be necessary and a temporary solution to release the burden of frustration. But we need to scream at each other. To gather friends and frighten foes, like a real tribe. We have the knowledge, now we have to use it properly.

How long has it been since you thought about that you could actually swim with whales as big as skyscrapers, see with the help of luminescent insects, hear birds making utopian sounds, be carried by horses at full gallop and walk among the mightiest trees and plants who are several hundred years

older than you. Can we pause together and breathe with the wind, enjoy the earth together as it is, with all its wonderful creatures and creations.

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