Deconstructing Intersectional Oppression in Outdoor Recreation

A case-study of the Feminist Hiking Collective

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Se io me ne vado a stare nel bosco nessuno dice niente,
se lo fa una donna la prendono per strega.
Paolo Cognetti – Le Otto Montagne

Let me go wild
We're only running out of time
LP – Wild
Abstract

This research aims to deconstruct the discretionary character of outdoor recreation, in view of the hegemonic nature of intersectional oppression. Once deconstructed, it also questions how outdoor recreation, inspired the Scandinavian concept of friluftsliv, can become a feminist space for resistance against this oppression. The Feminist Hiking Collective is presented as case-study.

**Key words:** feminist, feminist environmental humanities, friluftsliv, gender studies, intersectionality, intersectional oppression, hiking, leisure, nature, outdoors, outdoor recreation
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To the Wicklow Mountains, and to the Irish sea, and to Lus Mór – for the healing.
And obviously to Ciaran – you know.
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1. Introduction

In the Scandinavian context, since last century a key concept has emerged, namely *friluftsliv* [free-lufts-leav]. An official definition articulated by the Norwegian Ministry of Environment in 2000 refers to *friluftsliv* as “physical activity in open spaces during leisure time to participate in a variety of environments and foster aesthetic experience of nature” (Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, 2000, in Gurholt, 2015, p. 288). However, it is by no coincidence that this concept evolved in the Scandinavian context, where the right to access public or privately-owned “commons” such as lands, forests, lakes has been enshrined in law, in the so-called “the all mans right” *Allemansrätten* to freely roam. Both *friluftsliv* and *Allemansrätten* equally contribute to encouraging what is called outdoor recreation, recreational activities carried out in natural settings, whose positive benefits have been long established, both in terms of mental and physical wellbeing.

According to the Encyclopedia of Leisure and Outdoor Recreation, the term recreation emerged as early as the 16th century, literally meaning “re-creation, rebirth, or the action of creating anew” (Jenkins & Pigram, 2004, p. 412), intrinsically connected to another key term – leisure. Both terms share a key feature, that is being opposed to labor, whether in time - as in leisure, or in terms of activities - as in recreation. When it comes to recreation in the outdoors, the list of activities that can be carried out in the outdoors continues to expand. Many of these activities were originally “basic ‘survival’ activities” (Jenkins & Pigram, 2004, p. 412), such as running, swimming, hunting, fishing, camping, climbing. Though their “survival” character has over centuries shifted to being “discretionary”, thus, to be carried out in accordance with own’s one personal discretion. This could simply be explained by means of simple evolutionary theory, of historical progress. A huge contribution to this shift was the so-called agricultural revolution, which determined a shift from the gathering/hunting model to one of agriculture, meaning nature and animals domestications. An ever-increasing rate of urbanization then further contributed to shift away from the outdoors, resulting in major social, economic, cultural opportunities now revolving only around cities. Most of, at least in an European context, do not to forage or cultivate our food anymore, we are surrounded by a never/ending numbers of supermarkets. The outdoors are not even anymore needed for the “basic” activities abovementioned. We can decide to go for a run on a treadmill in our apartments, a hike by increasing the treadmill inclination or for a swim in a swimming pool. The discretionary character to engage or not in outdoor activities thus would simply translate into a what economists would define as an individual choice influenced mostly by self-interest. This, unfortunately, is rather an illusion.
1.1 Aim of Research
This thesis aims to deconstruct the discretionary character of participating in outdoor recreation, revealing how outdoor recreation must be analyzed as operating in accordance with the hegemonic nature of intersectional oppression. To achieve so, a feminist, intersectional approach and viewpoint is adopted, as to “redefine in fundamental ways the accepted historical categories and to make visible hidden structures of domination and exploitation” (Federici, 2004, p. 13), equally affecting the human and the more-than-human. Once intersectional oppression has been deconstructed, I aim to explore how outdoor recreation can become a feminist space to resist intersectional oppression.

The overarching question of this thesis thus reads as follows:

*How can outdoor recreation, inspired by the Scandinavian concept of friluftsliv, become a feminist space for resistance against intersectional oppression?*

1.2 Between Epistemology and Phenomenology: My Positionality
Drawing on feminist theory and intersectional gender studies, the epistemological approach to this thesis is grounded in what is usually referred as “the politics of location”, a concept by 1980’s feminist theorist Adrienne Rich (1984), and inspired by Donna Haraway’s kindred elaboration on “situated knowledges”. Haraway (1988) calls for a doctrine of feminist embodied objectivity, that is about “limited location and situated knowledge”, opposing god-trick “transcendence and splitting of subject and object” (p. 583). The researcher, the knower, rather than an outsider, becomes “in medias res (i.e., in the middle of), participant in and in compliance with, the analyzed world” (Lykke, 2010, p. 5), obtaining “a partially objective knowledge”, meaning

* a knowledge of the specific part of reality that she or he can ‘see’ from the position in which she or he is materially discursively located in time, space, body and historical power relations* (Lykke, 2010, p. 5)

Haraway (1988) argues that the practice of feminist objectivity shall privilege “contestation, deconstruction, passionate constriction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing” (p. 585). This enables me to start from where I am, in all its messy epistemological and geographical entanglements.

This thesis departs from my own positionality, from my own personal embodied experience of outdoor recreation, specifically of solo hiking in the Irish Wicklow Mountains, where rather
than an *Allemansrätten*, the right to freely roam, most land and even lakes, as Lough Tay, are enclosed in private estates, fortresses that can’t be accessed. It stems from my personal experience of many times being the sole female hiker, while I keep coming across male hikers. It also does come from searching for healing, for easiness from anxiety and alienation of living in cities and a life spent in front of a screen.

These were the points of departures. Over the past months, though this research has evolved in multiple directions, inspired by the ever-evolving field feminist environmental humanities and the fortune to be assigned one of the important scholars in the field as supervisor, Cecilia Åsberg. It has evolved in questioning and deconstructing categories of analysis, starting from the role and subordination of women and nature to the Universal man. It was only by deconstructing that I could then partake in the politics of hope – interpreting outdoor recreation to change it.

1.3 Thesis Disposition
After introducing the theories and approaches that mostly influenced this research, the first part of this research focuses on building the theoretical foundations to understand and socio-historically deconstruct intersectional oppression, firstly per se, and secondly, applied to outdoor recreation. In the second part, the case-study is introduced. In view of previous literature, the results are presented and discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework
In this section, I’ll briefly illustrate the theories and frameworks that have influenced and guided this master’s thesis.

2.1 Intersectionality
While the earliest elaboration on the concept of intersectionality must be attributed to Kimberlee Crenshaw, Nina Lykke (2010)’s elaboration has foremostly influenced both my studies and my writings. Lykke (2010) defines intersectionality as

*a theoretical and methodological tool to analyze how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities, based on discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed socio-cultural categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact, and in so doing produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations* (p. 50).
This is how intersectionality shall be understood throughout this research.

2.2 Feminist Environmental (Post)Humanities

The field of feminist environmental (post)humanities can be understood as site for different integrative approaches. On feminist (post)humanities, Cecilia Åsberg (2021) writes

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\text{what I have come to term feminist posthumanities refer to diverse emerging inter-, post- or even extra-disciplinary approaches that challenge a human-centered view of the universe and individualism at large (pp. 858 – 859).}
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Similarly, also the field of environmental humanities reject the humanities’ focus on the human, which has “often excluded or backgrounded the non-human world” (Rose et al., 2012, p. 1), favoring rather the articulation of “a ‘thicker’ notion of humanity”, one which positions all of us as “participants in lively ecologies of meaning and value” (Rose et al., 2012, p. 2).

Neimanis et al. (2015) write how “the efficacy of environmental humanities will depend on their ability to address contemporary problems that cannot be fully addressed by other configurations of knowledge production” (p. 73). Four problems are mentioned. The first problem is the problem of alienation and intangibility: “We seem to regard ourselves as separated from, not part of the imagined nature we seek to rescue” (Neimanis et al., 2015, p. 74). Second problem is “the problem of a technocratic approach in a post-political situation” – with “environmental issues become framed as merely a technocratic problem to be effectively managed” (Neimanis et al., 2015, p. 75). What is deeply political “becomes neutralized and converted into a stimulus for the utopia of neoliberalism and freewheeling capitalism” (Neimanis et al., 2015, p. 76). Thirdly, Neimanis et al. (2015) point out to the problem of negative framing: “Consistently negative, even apocalyptic, framing may not lead to effective citizen participation and may stifle opportunities for innovative thinking around environmental challenges” (Neimanis et al., 2015, p. 76). Lastly, the problem of compartmentalization of “environmental questions risks failing to address the integrated nature of environmental injustice, across questions of racism and coloniality, gender and sexual difference, poverty, social exclusion and other ethical domains” (Neimanis et al., 2015, p. 79). This clearly highlights the need for environmental humanities to be further approached with a feminist, intersectional lens. Overall, Neimanis et al., 2015 highlight that “drawing attention to the (often invisibilized) differences between bodies in the Anthropocene as well as their entangled nature must be a key priority for environmental humanities” (p. 79). This shall also the priority of this research.

2.3 Critical Theories and Gramsci’s Hegemonic Power

Critical theories also influenced this research, especially Gramsci’s concept of hegemony.
Recalling Gramsci’s articulation, Spracklen (2015) writes how

_Hegemonic power occurs when the rulers are able to have complete control over the public sphere and popular culture to such an extent that they limit the ability of their oppressed people to realise they suffer that state of oppression. Hegemonic power might be used to keep people in their marginalized social classes, but it can also operate to maintain white privileges or heteronormative masculinity_ (Sprackle, 2015, pp. 30 – 31).

Power becomes a form of manipulation to justify inequities. Beal (2018) provides a practical example:

*if scientists explain that men are more naturally inclined toward athletic activities then it becomes understandable that women do not participate at the same rates—and perhaps policy aimed at equity is scientifically unfeasible. Similarly, if physical education teachers consistently use "heterosexy" females to model appropriate skills for their classes, then certain gendered bodies become privileged over others, creating practices of exclusion* (p. 230).

Beal (2018) though also adds how critical theorists also “aim to promote social change”, as they believe “people have some degree of individual agency, some power to counteract the dominant groups’ knowledges and positions” (p. 230).

2.4 Hegemonic Masculinities

While the general concept of hegemony overarches this research, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is of particular interest for this analysis.

Australian scholar Raewyn Connell is usually regarded as the key author in articulating the concept of hegemonic masculinity, theorized in 1987 as a normative pattern of practices, embodying “the currently most honored way of being a man”, requiring “all other men to position themselves in relation to it”, and above all, ideologically legitimizing and allowing “men dominance over women” to be perpetuated (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832).

While Connell’s early writing on hegemonic masculinity dates far back to 1987, for this analysis I shall leverage on her restructuring of the concept in the early 2000s, following the critiques and debates that emerged following the first publication.

First of all, it is important to highlight that while the concept is foremostly brought up in a singular connotation, it nonetheless shall be understood as encompassing both “the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities”, overall presuming “the subordination of nonhegemonic masculinities” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846).

Hegemonic masculinities are not fixed, rather they are constructed, re-constructed and situated
historically and geographically. In relation to gender hierarchy, Connell rejects her earlier theorization “to locate all masculinities (and all femininities) in terms of a single pattern of power”, what she had defined in 1987 as a “global dominance of men over women” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846). It is argued that it defies other key elements, such as “the complexity of the relationship among different constructions of masculinity” and “the agency of subordinated and marginalized groups” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 847). The sole focus on men also obscures both what Connell defines “emphasized femininity”, understood as “compliance to patriarchy” 848, and the roles and practices of women - as mothers, wives, workers – in constructing and conditioning masculinities. These key elements shall be more holistically incorporated in the understanding of gender hierarchies within hegemonic masculinity.

Secondly, in their reconceptualization of the geography of masculinities (and femininities), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest analyzing hegemonic masculinity at three levels: local, as in familial, communal, and organizational level; regional, at the national and cultural level; global, “constructed in transnational arenas such as world politics and transnational business and media” (p. 849). Their inter-/intra- play is important, and while there’s a predominant focus on the global level, the authors spotlight the relation between regional and local masculinities, providing the practical example of sport. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) highlight how local practices “such as engaging in professional sporting events - constructs hegemonic masculine models (e.g., “star athletes”) at the regional level”, which then “in turn affect other local settings” (p. 850). These 3-level framework allows for hegemonic masculinity to be analyzed both as situated to specific context in time and place, but nonetheless as interrelated to other realities.

Thirdly, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) draw the attention to social embodiment, specifically to the ways in which hegemonic masculinity relates to masculine embodiment, to men’s bodies as means for identity and behavior. As it clearly emerges in sport, skilled bodily activity not only “becomes a prime indicator of masculinity” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 851), but also a display of heterosexuality in Western culture. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) remark how “bodies are both objects of social practice and agent in social practice”, as they participate “in social action by delineating courses of social conduct” (p. 851). Though, it is worth highlighting how “Among dominant groups of men, the circuits of social embodiment constantly involve the institutions on which their privilege rest” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 852). In a study on the daily lives of ruling-class men, it clearly emerged not only how “their characteristic sports, leisure, and eating practices deploy their wealth”, rather they further
serve as means to “establish relations of distance and dominance over other men’s bodies” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 852).

Lastly, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) once again emphasize the dynamicity of masculinities, as “configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time”, with different layers but also potential internal contradictions, divisions, and emotional conflicts, precisely due to “their association with gendered power” (p. 852), and gender relations. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) clearly write:

* A given pattern of hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic to the extent that it provides a solution to these tensions, tending to stabilize patriarchal power or reconstitute it in new conditions. A pattern of practice (i.e., a version of masculinity) that provided such a solution in past conditions but not in new conditions is open to challenge—is in fact certain to be challenged (p. 853).

This is not predictable, rather it is historically open to any changes, but also to a possible failure of hegemony itself. Overall, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) conclude their analysis by re-affirming that the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity should not only focus on the reproduction of hierarchies, rather it should “explicitly acknowledge the possibility of democratizing gender relations, of abolishing power differentials” (p. 853).

3. De-constructing Intersectional Oppression in Outdoor Recreation

Rather than discretionary, Karl Spracklen (2015) argues how “leisure activities are not offered to us all equally”, rather “each of us has been given specific changes, opportunities and constraints” on the basis of “our parents, our class, our gender, our nationality, our sexuality, our ‘race’ and our nationality” (pp. 29 – 30). As for other aspects of human life, the resources “that allow us to have meaningful leisure lives are not distributed equally” (Spacklen, 2015, p. 30). Spracklen (2015) further argues that “the claim that everybody can have these meaningful and freely chosen leisure lives” should rather be analyzed by taking into account “the intersectional oppression that operates today”, which he defines “hegemonic in nature” (p. 30). Participation in outdoor recreation must thus be understood and deconstructed in view of the hegemonic nature of intersectional oppression. While Spracklen highlights how this oppression operates today, this rather stems from practices and perceptions that date far back in history.

In order to be able to answer the researched question on how outdoor recreation can indeed become a feminist space for resistance, it becomes important to firstly take a step back and explore the different entanglements of intersectional oppression. This shall firstly be achieved by exploring the double-edge process that starting from the late Middles Ages in
Europe, in the “transition” period between the feudal system and the capitalist system, contributed to disregard nature and women as the first “non-human”, background for the activities of the Universal man and of reason, perpetrated and suiting the needs of respectively the early capitalist regime, the scientific revolution, the Catholic Church, and the early nation-state. For this purpose, the sociohistorical analysis of Caroline Merchant, in “The Death of Nature”, and Silvia Federici, in “Caliban and the Witch” will provide the foundational theoretical basis. The choice to focus on “women” as the initial category of analysis, rather than other gender identities shall be understood as a departure point for understanding other forms of intersectional oppression that also developed in the same period. In addition, Federici (2004) also argues for “women” representing a “legitimate category of analysis”, as the sexual division of labor that masks “the production of the work-force under the cover of a biological destiny” (p. 14) is far from being transcended, even in contemporary society. Once understood the sociohistorical context, the analysis will focus on how intersectional oppression operates specifically in outdoor recreation. The theoretical aspect will be further expanded with practical examples, coming from the world of high-altitude mountaineering and trail running.

3.1 De-constructing “Nature”, De-constructing “Woman”
In “The Death of Nature”, firstly published in 1980, American ecofeminist and science historian Caroline Merchant describes two identifications and perceptions of nature, a positive one resembling the image of “a nurturing mother”, in opposition to the “wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos”, also identified as female (Merchant, 1989, p. 2). For centuries, the first idea served as a controlling image, “operating as ethical restraints or as ethical sanctions – as subtle “oughts” or “ought-nots”” (Merchant, 1989, p. 4). Thus, as long as the earth and nature were perceived to be alive and sensitive, “it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out destructive acts against it” (Merchant, 1989, p. 3). Though as the present environmental and ecological degradation demonstrate, this did not last long. The second image of a wild and uncontrollable nature paved the way for the modern idea of the mastering of nature, of power over nature, which could only be achieved on the condition of nature becoming passive, non-human, allowing “for the possibility of its use and manipulation” (Merchant, 1989, p. 9). This, as it shall be seen, was perfectly in line with the Scientific Revolution’s aim to “mechanize and to rationalize the world view” (Merchant, 1989, p. 2).
Merchant’s analysis is inscribed in what she defines as an “ecosystem model”, compromising both “natural and human environment” as an “interrelated system” (Merchant, 1989, p. 42). When studying historical change, an ecosystem model reveals “the relationships between the resources associated with a given natural ecosystem” and “the human factors affecting its stability or disruption over historical time periods” (Merchant, 1989, p. 42 -43). By adopting this model, Merchant (1989) seeks to investigate how both the natural and human environment were impacted in the transition period “from peasant control of natural resource for the purpose of substance to capitalist control for the purpose of profit” (p. 43). This transition period is key both Merchant’s analysis but also for this thesis, because it is exactly within this period that intersectional oppression firstly emerges and assumes the connotations that persist up to today. It is also within this period that outdoor activities lost its “survival” character and became what we now acknowledge as recreational activities.

Not only Merchant, rather also American-Italian scholar Silvia Federici in “Caliban and the Witch” (2004) poses her attention on the same transition period, integrating it from “the viewpoint of women, the body, and primitive accumulation” (p. 12). On primitive accumulation, Federici writes how it consisted in “never before matched in the course of history” of accumulation of “labor-power”, both in terms of “living labor in the form of human beings” and “dead labor in the form of stolen goods”, meaning natural and environmental resources, both “made available for exploitation” (Federici, 2004, p. 64). As for Marx, Federici shares the view that “the immiseration of the working class began with war and land privatization”, better defined as “land expropriation” (Federici, 2004, p. 68). This expropriation was not only limited to the farmlands, rather as Merchant clearly points out, it also expanded to other “commons” and communal resources, such as ferns and forests. It is this usurpation that undermined not only the individual and communal capacity for subsistence, but also the ecological balance of the environment, “as the land was now “free” to function as a means of accumulation and exploitation” (Federici, 2004, p. 75). With the end of a subsistence-based economy, “the unity of production and reproduction [...] based on production-for-use came to end”, substituted by production-for-market as the only “value-creating activity” (Federici, 2004, p. 74 –75).

Though, as many Marxist and socialist feminists have pointed out, this Marx-inspired explanation does not suffice to explain the changes in the social position of women. This, Federici argues, can only be understood by integrating the following elements to Marx’s elaboration of primitive accumulation:
(i) the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women's labor and women's reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force; (ii) the construction of a new patriarchal order, based upon the exclusion of women from waged work and their subordination to men; (iii) the mechanization of the proletarian body and its transformation, in the case of women, into a machine for the production of new workers (Federici, 2004, p. 12).

The reproduction of the worker understood both in terms of “on a generational basis” and “regenerating daily their capacity to work” (Federici, 2004, p. 18), “ceased to be considered as work”, rather “its function in the accumulation of capital became invisible, being mystified as a natural vocation and labelled “women’s labor”” (Federici, 2004, p. 75). The reproduction of the work, bore by women, became to be considered simply as a “natural resource” (Federici, 2004, p. 18), thus free, as the now passive natural environment, to be exploited for the capitalist creation of surplus. This point is crucial in providing a first understanding of the connection between women and nature and their shared inferiorisation, in a process defined by Plumwood as “backgrounding” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 21). Plumwood (1993) writes how “dominant western culture has systematically inferiorised, backgrounded and denied dependency on the whole sphere of reproduction and subsistence” (p. 21). The dominant western culture that Plumwood refers to is not only one embedded in the capitalist system, rather also the one borne out of the Scientific Revolution. This is a key element, which in Merchant’s analysis contributed to the transition from a human, active nature to the mechanistic paradigm of nature, divided into passive, inert “atomic particles” (Merchant, 1989, p. 185), moved by external forces, thus “consistent with the possibilities for increased technological and administrative growth” (Merchant, 1989, p. 186). By rendering nature dead and inhuman, by backgrounding it, western culture denied its “dependence on biospheric processes” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 21), reaffirming the dogmatic assumption of the “distinction between nature and culture”, of the “superiority of culture to nature” (Merchant, 1989, p. 144). This, as Plumwood notes, still represents “a major factor in the perpetuation of the non-sustainable modes of using nature” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 21), threatening our current ecosystem. On the other side, by backgrounding women, their reproductive roles were and continue to be “systematically omitted from account in the economic system […], human history and culture” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 22). In addition, it worth mentioning that in the new science-based society and culture, the new sexual division of labor further “helped to structure the nature of the empirical method”, producing “a new form of knowledge and a new ideology of objectivity seemingly devoid of cultural and political assumptions” (Merchant, 1989, p. 172).
Though, neither the death of nature nor rendering invisible the reproduction of the worker could solely serve the purposes of the new capitalist system, the new sexual division of labor and the new pure “objective” knowledge to truly establish themselves. Two other crucial actors were needed to further ostracize women from the public, while exploiting them in their private: the Church and newly emerged nation-state.

Indeed, as already mentioned, the separation between production and reproduction confined women to the household and their work was deprived of any value. Though Federici (2004) questions “under what conditions such degradation was possible”, further “what social forces promoted it or were complicitous with it” (p. 95). Federici (2004) writes:

*The answer here is that an important factor in the devaluation of women's labor was the campaign that craft workers mounted, starting in the late 15th century, to exclude female workers from their work-shops, presumably to protect themselves from the assaults of the capitalist merchants who were employing women at cheaper rates. [...] journeymen petitioned the authorities not to allow women to compete with them, banned them from their ranks, went on strike when the ban was not observed, and even refused to work with men who worked with women (pp. 95-96).*

Women’s relegation to domestic work was even perceived as an absolute necessity by these craftsmen, as to avoid “bankruptcy and for keeping an independent shop” (Federici, 2004, p. 96). What is clear is that, if the craftsmen’s revindications were successful, two elements were crucial: the threat of male (sexual) violence against the women who tried to resist, and as Federici remarks, the urban authorities that cooperated with the craftsmen, pursuing not only the political necessity to pacify “the rebellious journeymen”, rather the capitalist purpose to fixate women “in reproductive labor and their utilization as low-waged workers in cottage industry” (Federici, 2004, p. 96).

The pacification of the workforce was part of other set of initiatives enacted by local authorities to prevent and disperse social conflict in the “transition period”. Federici (2004) poses the attention on a widespread attack that “was launched against all forms of collective sociality and sexuality [...] and other group-rituals” (p. 83), though she reveals that “what was at stake was the desocialization or decollectivization of reproduction of the work-force”, with a complementary attempt “to impose a more productive use of leisure time” (p. 83). The land expropriation that resulted in the creation of physical, private enclosures “was amplified by a process of social enclosure” (Federici, 2004, p. 84). Not only the reproduction of the workers but also the re-creation of the worker in terms of leisure shifted “from the openfield to the
home, from the community to the family, from the public space […] to the private” (Federici, 2004, p. 84).

It is also by no coincidence that while the capitalist system was focused on fixating women in reproductive labor, two key institutions of modern Europe also arose in this period in support of the early capitalist-based economy, namely the family and the nation-state. The role of the early nation state in establishing the patriarchal order was the focus of my bachelor’s thesis, in which I aimed to explore the origins of the patriarchy between the private and the private. While I abandoned the quest for universality that I sought at that time for a more “situated knowledge” approach, while I also luckily acknowledge some theoretical “dissonance” between the 2020-me and the master’s student-me who’s currently writing, I do find the following passage as key to understanding the role of state in establishing the new sexual division of labor:

*Because as Hudson et al. emphasize, “although dominant men police lower-ranking men, all men police women”. Consequently, “the deal struck for the lower-ranking men to submit to the male hierarchy is that in addition to being able to share the benefits of the male alliance, they will be able - even encouraged - to enjoy and display dominance against ‘others’, with the first Others being women” (Hudson et al. 2020: 38). [...] for the new state and its particularistic notions of obligation and allegiance to be respected, in exchange for men’s obedience to the state, these men were granted and allowed to exercise their dominance over women and over any human being relegated to the sphere of ‘otherness’ [non-human] (Consalter, 2020, p. 26).*

By ceding to the craftsmen’s request of excluding women from waged work, the early nation-state authorities allowed for “a new “sexual contract,”” in Carol Pateman’s words (1988)”, to be forged, according to which “proletarian women became for male workers the substitute for the land lost to the enclosures”, their bodies providing free access to male workers’ “basic means of reproduction” (Federici, 2004, p. 97). In the new capitalist nation-state, Federici (2004) writes how women “became a communal good”, the lost “commons”, their activities defined “as non-work”, as a “natural resource” (Federici, 2004, p. 97), devalued both economically and socially and solely functioning as backgrounding.

The initial economic and social devaluation of women later expanded to other realms, *in primis* in the legal sphere, where “women experienced a process of legal infantilization”, being stripped for example “of their right to conduct economic activities alone”, or “the right to make contracts or to represent themselves in court” (Federici, 2004, p. 100). Key to this thesis’s objectives is also the “new sexual differentiation of space”, with women expelled “not only from many waged jobs but also from the streets”, further “discouraged from sitting in
front of their homes” and also “instructed not to spend time with their female friends” (Federici, 2004, p. 100), seeking the same rupture of social cohesion that early was adopted to disperse working class men. New cultural canons were constructed “maximizing the differences between women and men” (Federici, 2004, p. 100), dictating what was more appropriate in terms of femininity and masculinity, the latter being “naturally” superior. Though, it is important to highlight that

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\text{none of the tactics deployed against European women and colonial subjects would have succeeded, had they not been sustained by a campaign of terror. In the case of European women it was the witch-hunt that played the main role in the construction of their new social function, and the degradation of their social identity (Federici, 2004, p. 102).}
\]

One last key actor must thus be analyzed, namely the Church and its role, together with the nation-state, in appropriating women’s bodies and forcing it “to function as a means for the reproduction and accumulation of labor” (Federici, 2004, p. 16), in a precise “political project aiming to strip them of any autonomy and social power” (Federici, 2004, p. 101).

Similarly to the death of nature in Merchant, once the “Mechanical Philosophy” started to permeate society, bodies were dissected, “conceived as brute matter, wholly divorced from any rational qualities”, thus, as in the case of nature, dehumanized and available “to an infinite manipulation of its power and possibilities” (Federici, 2004, p. 139). Though for the mechanical body to become paradigm, it required “the destruction by the state”, and Church, “of a vast range of pre-capitalist beliefs, practices and social subjects whose existence contradicted the regularization of corporeal behavior”, embedded in the new mechanistic view of both nature and the body. Citing Bordieu (1994),

\[
\text{the instituted institution makes us forget that it issues out of a long series of acts of institution (in the active sense) and hence has all the appearances of the natural (p. 4).}
\]

Rather “given” and natural, the new objective knowledge had to enforce itself by means of destroying anything belonging to the magical world, which still supported “an animistic conception” of both nature and the body, and “did not admit to any separation between matter and spirit” (Federici, 2004, p. 141), thus incompatible with both the newly emerged nation-state embedded in culture and reason, nor “with capitalist work-discipline and the requirement of social control” (Federici, 2004, p. 143). A campaign of terror, torture and discipline was thus launched against magic, against witches and any practitioner of magic – the so-called witch-
hunt - eliminating any irrationalities that “stood in the way of the transformation of the individual and social body into a set of predictable and controllable mechanisms” (Federici, 2004, p. 144). Not only by violence, the witch-hunt represented the first “persecution in Europe that made use of a multimedia propaganda to generate a mass psychosis among the population”, a propaganda for which the Roman Catholic Church “provided the metaphysical and ideological scaffold” embedded in its misogynous campaigns against women (Federici, 2004, p. 168). Two text are considered to be crucial for providing the theoretical basis for the witch-hunt: Innocent VIII’s papal Bull “Summis desiderantes affectibus” published in 1484, requested by two German inquisitors, where witchcraft and the devil were considered a threat and thus allowing for any necessary measures to eliminate them; this served the basis for the second text, the “Malleus Maleficarum”, translated into the Hammer of Witches, published two years later in 1486 and considered to be the manual on how to recognize, hunt and eliminate witches. While the Church and the Saint Inquisition against heresy provided the theoretical foundations, if the number of women tried for witchcraft escalated was influenced by the fact that “the initiative for the persecution passed from the Inquisition to the secular courts” (Federici, 2004, p. 166). Though

How to account for the fact that for more than two centuries, in several European countries, hundreds of thousands of women were tried, tortured, burned alive or hanged, accused of having sold body and soul to the devil and, by magical means, murdered scores of children, sucked their blood, made potions with their flesh, caused the death of their neighbors, destroyed cattle and crops, raised storms, and performed many other abominations? (Federici, 2004, p. 169)

In Federici’s opinion

We must conclude that witch-hunting in Europe was an attack on women’s resistance to the spread of capitalist relations and the power that women had gained by virtue of their sexuality, their control over reproduction, and their ability to heal. […] Witch hunting was also instrumental to the construction of a new patriarchal order where women’s bodies, their labor, their sexual and reproductive powers were placed under the control of the state and transformed into economic resources (Federici, 2004, p. 170).

It is by no coincidence that the politicization of sexuality and women’s bodies also started in this transition period, as “women’s control over reproduction seemed to pose a threat to economic and social stability” (Federici, 2004, p. 40). Federici argues that a key starting point was the decline in population of the 16th-17th centuries that “turned reproduction and population growth into state matters, as well as primary objects of intellectual discourse” (Federici, 2004,
During this period, severe penalties were introduced in the legal codes of Europe against contraception, abortion, and infanticide, aimed at breaking the control women “had exercised over their bodies and reproduction” for centuries (Federici, 2004, pp. 87-88). Midwives and healers were particularly persecuted during the witch-hunt for their medicinal and herbal knowledge, especially in terms of herbs used for abortion. Their marginalization paved the way not only for the predominance of male doctors, rather it also provided the ground for a new medical practice, “one that in the case of a medical emergency prioritized the life of the fetus over that of the mother” (Federici, 2004, p. 89). Women’s bodies and their wombs thus “became public territory”, controlled by men, by the state, by the Church and by the new scientific objective knowledge that men were the sole representative of, and “procreation was directly placed at the service of capitalist accumulation” (Federici, 2004, p. 89).

Lastly, the same patterns of primitive accumulation were established in the territories subjected to European colonial violence. By rendering it passive and non-human, the concept of nature started to embrace and be synonym for “everything that reason excludes” (Plumwood, 1993, p. 20). Thus, by actively allowing for the exploitation of nature, it allowed firstly the exploitation (and genocide) of European women accused of witchcraft, and by the same logic, “other social classes and groups that were seen to be threatening or peripheral to reason and progress” (Eckersley, 1998, p. 183) - of which the white, bourgeois man could be the true sole representative. Though, for the new production-machine to also work in the colonies, neither the land deprivation nor the sexual division of labor did suffice. Rather, the construction of racial hierarchies was also needed, and enforced by any means necessary to keep the system in place, from depriving indigenous people of civic rights, to even prohibiting “marriage and sexual relations between blacks and whites” (Federici, 2004, p. 108). Similarly to the European context, any possible social cohesion between the settlers and indigenous people against the capitalist system and the colonizing state had to be destroyed, for the system to truly establish itself.

3.2 Intersectional Oppression in Outdoor Recreation
The above intersecting analysis of Merchant and Federici’s writings has hopefully posed the foundations for a better understanding that the intersectional oppression, especially in outdoor recreation, stems from a complex history of institutionalized social structures which have come to assume the hegemonic connotations over centuries-long processes. Before proceeding to the
analysis of intersectional oppression in outdoor recreation, there’s few key elements that are worth again remarking from Merchant and Federici’s analysis.

The land expropriation not only deprived people from accessing the farmland and the other *commons* for their subsistence. Rather, it also secluded people, in its literal sense of obstructing access, to social communal relations that revolved around the preservations of the commons. The physical creation of private land enclosures translated into a process of social enclosures, drawing people, especially women, from communal spaces to the private institution of the family. Though, it is important to highlight that while the proletariat class was expropriated from the commons, these were not solely turned into means of production. Rather, they were also converted into royal hunting preserves or parks or formal garden parks, thus spaces for outdoor recreation, entertainment and relaxion for the upper, ruling classes. It is for these social classes that leisure, especially in terms of outdoor recreation, was thus available at any time. The migration from the countryside to the towns, which had already started as Federici suggests with the “commutation of labor services with money payments” (p. 28) earlier in 13\(^{th}\) century, further increased following the establishment of enclosures and private property. It is around these urban spaces that primitive accumulation contributed to further shift away from a subsistence-based economy to an early model of capitalist economy, where the production-for-market became the sole activity creating value. It is by no coincidence that the shift to the capitalism also contributed to diminishing and controlling both time and access to “leisure” and recreation, obviously disregarded as not being productive for the system. With the so-called Industrial Revolution, not only access for the working-classes to leisure became even more limited, rather both the working conditions and living conditions worsen, especially for factories workers living in the cities. It is against this background that the call for *friluftsLiv*, in its literary free-air-life meaning, and the call for more outdoor recreation emerged, especially from those “who did not live their daily life in the “freedom” of the outdoors” (Faarlund, 1987 in Gurholt, 2008, p. 58). Starting from nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, time for recreation started to be embedded in many labor laws aiming to reduce working hours. The right to rest and leisure was even enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights under article 24. While *de jure* a “human” right, *de facto* again the same question arises: who’s missing from this conversation? As societies started to become more and more organized around capitalist production principles and urbanization increased, recreational activities became not only discretionary as already mentioned, rather also perceived as “beneficial in terms of making workers more productive” (Jenkins & Pigram, 2004, p. 412). If initially emerged as non-work, thus over time recreation, especially outdoor recreation, has become for
some aspects paradoxically “to take on many of the characteristics of work”, or in other words “structured, fast-paced, and competitive”, and the involvement in recreational activities to be justifiable on the grounds of constructiveness or productiveness. The “discretionary” character of recreational activities thus rather obscures the reality that actively participating in them requires the necessary time and finances, leading to what Jenkins and Pigram (2004) argue “to marked status differentiation, both within and between different activities” (p. 412). In order to provide the reader with a concrete understanding of intersectional oppression in the outdoor recreation, I will leverage on a practical example - the act of walking in the outdoors.

Many refer to the simple act of walking in the outdoors as hiking. It does not require any special skills or equipment, though a pair of good shoes and a raincoat help in some countries, especially in Ireland. Although, many would also argue that their walking in the outdoors should be referred as trekking, rather than hiking. What this conveys is that trekking requires an additional set of skills that the simple act of hiking does not require. Hierarchy starts being established, based on skills, time, finances, and fitness level. When trekking does not suffice, another layer of hierarchy is added when trail running is taken into consideration, where walking becomes substituted by running. Though running skills do not suffice when mountaineering or alpinism join the conversation, where ascending the highest mountains becomes the focus. Some of us might think that the top of this hierarchal pyramid is reached with the ascendance and conquest of the ultimate peak, Mount Everest. Though this hierarchal level was already surpassed by mountaineering pioneer Reinhold Messner, who was the first to summit all 14 of the world’s 8000-meter peaks in 16 years between 1970 and 1986. Messner’s record was firstly challenged in 2019 by Nepali mountaineer Nirmal Purja, climbing the famous 14 peaks in only six months and six days, of which the Netflix’s documentary “14 Peaks: Nothing is Impossible” gives a pretty insightful account. Though on July 27, Norwegian female mountaineer Kristin Harila and her Sherpa guide Tenjin claimed Purja’s record, completing the 14 peaks-round in only three months and one day. This, as the present stands, remains the top of the pyramid, at least in my humble opinion. Going back to Nepali mountaineer Nirmal Purja, when the 14 Peak’s Netflix Documentary was released, he released the following statement:

*I wanted my 14 Peaks Challenge to inspire people with the love of the Big Mountains, but more than that, I want everyone to know that if you set your mind to something you can achieve it – no matter who you are and where you come from.*
The role that Nirmal Purja had in making the Nepali mountaineering community visible and acknowledged can’t be overlooked. Although, the mindset that clearly emerges from this statement, on the grounds of “if you want it hard enough, if you work hard enough, you will also achieve what I was able to achieve”, rather resembles a culture of toxic positivity that once again focuses on the discretionary power of individuals. It once again overlooks the fact that we as individuals are not given the same opportunities, that the privileges that are given us continue as means to reproduce intersectional oppression.

The history of Western mountaineering as recreation, especially in the Indian part of Himalayas, reveals rather a history of hegemonic whiteness and masculinity, intersecting with the history of colonization. Those who in mainstream media, at least in Europe, are acknowledged to be the earliest known mountaineers are never indigenous people, living in these areas. Rather, it is always European upper-class white men, officially explorers, though whether directly or indirectly serving both their state’s colonizing purposes, and the quest of conquering nature. Mount Everest is the emblem of this. Mount Everest became known the West thanks to the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India. When its height was calculated, Colonel Waugh, the Surveyor General of India, proposed to name it after his predecessor Colonel George Everest, as the native name was not “very likely to be ascertained before we are allowed to penetrate into Nepaul” (Slemon, 1998, p. 15). Slemon (1998) writes:

What put Mount Everest “there” at the top of the world was technology and a powerful act of colonial naming, but what put the discourse of mountaineering into play—what it was that added the language of climbing the mountain to the meaning of “Mount Everest”—was Mount Everest’s geopolitical location on the frontier of colonial control in British India (p. 16).

In “The Death of Nature”, Merchant (1989) had argued how “the mechanistic model reinforced and accelerated the exploitation of nature and human beings as resources” (p. 43). The history of how Mount Everest came to be is a concrete example of Merchant’s elaboration. At the time of British discovery, Mount Everest and the Himalayas belonged to Tibet and Nepal, thus “boundary sites for British colonial administrators”, “places defined by their inaccessibility”, “by the burgeoning need to know about them as the competition between British and Russian interests in imperial expansion intensified” (Slemon, 1998, p. 16). In order to at least symbolically manage the “unknown”, the British empire in the late 19th century thus adopted what Thomas Richards defined as “archival confinement – that is, the act of amassing data about colonial regions at both a physical and an ethnographic level” (Slemon, 1998, p. 16).
Mount Everest became “an allegory for the inaccessibility of that information which would provide the material for knowledge-construction in the symbolically controlling imperial archive” (Slemon, 1998, p. 17). Consequently, triumphantly climbing it “became the inevitable site for an allegory of colonial continuance” (Slemon, 1998, p. 17) and British colonial control. This was achieved with the first successful ascent of Everest in 1953 by New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay of Nepal, right before the coronation of Queen Elizabeth. As Slemon elaborates (1998), Everest was not only finally conquered, “but conquered by the “new Renaissance Men” “of British blood and breed”” (p. 18). This narrative of the conquest by a (white) Western men continues to persist in mountaineering narratives, at the service of reproduction of hegemonic powers, of intersectional oppression. In terms of hegemonic whiteness, this dominant narrative contributes to suspend “the generative agency of the enabling, “native” guides on climbing expeditions” (Slemon, 1998, p. 21), the Sherpas becoming only “coolies or porters”, and even when “they climb as team-members on the final pitch, they are never route finders, and they never get there first” (Slemon, 1998, p. 21). Secondly, this narrative also fosters the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Frohlick (2000) writes how “the practice of naming and ranking ascents produces a masculinized landscape women are not expected to occupy”. Frohlick (2000) draws the attention to the mountaineering literature written after the first Everest ascent up to 1970s in the construction of the hyper-masculine mountaineer man, of which Austrian alpinist Reinhold Messner represents a key example. As mentioned earlier, Messner was not only the first to complete all 14 of the world’s 8000-meter peaks, rather he was also the first to ascend Everest without bottled oxygen. In his writing, Messner argued that in order to experience Everest in the purest form, to truly be a man, he had to climb without the “artificial” support of bottled oxygen. While this happened almost 50 years ago, this mindset continues to linger within the high mountaineering community, in narratives that imply that the kind of approach “one is going to take to climb Everest is to work out what kind of man one is” (Frohlick, 2000). Frohlick (2000) writes:

*The cultural productions and performances of these so-called disembodied masculinities can usefully be theorized as excessively masculine in that they call up strong cultural idioms and stereotypes about manhood, about "men being men." At the same time and in a paradoxical way, these narratives produce an incredibly gender blind high-altitude mountaineering landscape. Occupied by universal (male) heroes oblivious to their positions and privileges in the world, high mountain peaks are presumed to be free of women. Gendered bodies disappear from view even as the space is aggressively masculinized.*
Frohlich further highlights that “when men reach the summits and claim their titles, they do so in gender-neutral terms” (Frohlick, 2000). Not only men, rather this disembodied hegemonic masculinity also permeates mainstream media, regardless of gender. Shifting to the world of trail running, one of the most important races is the Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc, a 100-mile spectacular trail running race across Italy, Switzerland, and France. In 2023, the men’s race was won by the first American male athlete, Jim Walmsley. In the post-race interview, the interviewer (woman) asked Jim how it felt to be “the first one to sign down a US victory at the UTMB” (Replay Dacia-UTMB, 2:34:05). This specific race had already been won by US athletes multiple times – though, never by a male athlete. In the most recent race history, U.S. Salomon athlete Courtney Dauwalter had already won UTMB twice in 2019 and 2021, before securing her third win in 2023. Though, the victory can only become truly “American” when a male athlete wins, because as Frohlich suggests, a man winning makes it gender-neutral thus representative of humanity as a whole, whereas a woman winning makes it gendered, thus not universal. To the interviewer, Jim answered: “I only get to join the strong U.S women contingent, you can’t take it away from them, they have done it again and again here, and I’m just happy to stand on their shoulders” (Replay Dacia-UTMB, 2:34:22).

Returning to the world of Western mountaineering, the first ascent of Everest paved the way not only for hegemonic whiteness and masculinity in high-altitude mountaineering, rather also for the fetishization of “arrival points that are by definition unpeopled by cultural others” (Slemon, 1998, p. 21) Though, as the colonial allegory ceased, reaching Everest’s summit had to be reformulated to abide the new neo-colonialism’s purposes. Slemon (1998) identifies the key turning point in 1985 when American oil tycoon Dick Bass ‘‘cliented’’ his way up Everest at the age of fifty-five – accompanied by his climbing partner Frank Wells, president of Warner Brothers” (p. 22). If the British colonial archival confinement had posed the foundations for the mechanistic conception of nature, then Bass and Well’s ascent brought capitalism into the conversation and paved the way for the Disneyfication of Everest with commercial expeditions. Reaching the summit of the “Goddess of the Sky” Sagarmatha, Nepali name for Mount Everest, started to be “violently translated – by commodification, by commerce, by the staging of postmodern nationalist arrival” (Slemon, 1998, p. 25) turning climbing Everest into “a mainstreet, a traffic jam, a ship-of-fools party on the rooftop of the world” (Slemon, 1998, p. 25). According to the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPPC), the NGO designated by the Nepali government to manage waste,
SSPC argues that, while this has contributed to support the expansion of the local economy, it has also contributed to increasing levels of environmental degradation, of which the base camps and surrounding national park of Mount Everest has become the epitome. In Spring climbing season 2021, the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPPC) received a total of 60,039 kgs wastes from expedition groups, of which a third consisted in human waste. Microplastics were also found “in snow and stream water samples on Mt. Everest” (Napper et al., 2020), at 8400 m.a.s.l. Although most visitors remain foreigners, the responsibility of clean ups and waste management once again relies on the local populations, the most affected by the problem.

Hegemonic oppression thus operates as multi-axis, intersectional discrimination, equally affecting both the human and non-human, as the increasing levels of environmental degradation clearly demonstrate. Parry (2014) argued

> for a new phase of feminist leisure scholarship wherein research does not focus solely on understanding how women live and negotiate their leisure experiences within a patriarchal society, but rather enacts social justice by challenging and breaking down gendered social structures (Parry, 2003). It is not enough to interpret the world—one must change it as well (Denzin, 2000).

In view of this deconstruction of intersectional oppression, how can then outdoor recreation become a feminist space for resistance?

### 4. Case-Study: The Feminist Hiking Collective

#### 4.1 Introduction

The Feminist Hiking Collective (FHC) is a feminist, trans-inclusive organization, formed in January 2020, and registered under Italian law as non-profit organization. The founders are of diverse national background, ranging from Italy, to UK, to Ecuador and Nepal, aged between 23 and 35. Participation in FHC is on volunteer basis, even for board members. The aim of the FHC is “to contribute to transformative system change through feminist popular education, research and resource co-creation”, and as the name suggests, “to build collective feminist leadership and power through hiking” (Feminist Hiking Collective, 2023).
4.2 Methods

This is a qualitative interview study, conducted with one of the Feminist Hiking Collective co-founders and board member, Ria Ryan. I chose this organization for various reasons: first of all, for its positionality within a European context, and its strong connection to my country of origin, Italy; secondly, for its understanding of hiking as a political, feminist act; lastly, for their recent hiking retreat, an opportunity for the theoretical to be put into practice.

The interview was semi-structured, conducted remotely on Microsoft Teams and previous consent, recorded, and transcribed. Data processing was provided via written consent by the interviewee. Consent could be withdrawn any time without giving a reason.

Thematic analysis was then used to analyze the recording and transcription, inspired by 6-step framework elaborated by Braun and Clarke. The first step was to become familiar with the data, meaning thoroughly reading and re-reading the transcript. While the transcript was generated automatically by Microsoft Teams, it was further double-verified and integrated with the video recording, as to obtain accurate data. Initial codes were then generated, upon which preliminary themes were identified and organized, as to provide a structure account of the interview. Lastly, the following analysis section was written, and submitted to the interviewee Ria Ryan for her approval.

4.3 Analysis

While officially founded in 2020, I was very interested in firstly understanding the background story of how the Feminist Hiking Collective (now on referred also as FHC) came to be the Feminist – Hiking – Collective in its literal sense.

The idea arose as some of the co-founders were working for an NGO in London, focused on addressing issues like feminist leadership, intersectionality, gender-based violence. While this represented an interesting opportunity to engage in feminist work, the structure and framework of the NGO itself was perceived as limiting, especially in terms of organizational structure favoring a “classic” corporate approach and top-down processes, rather than the autonomy and freedom which would create a shared equal space. It is against this hierarchal organizational structure that the idea of a collective arises within the co-founders, where equality and feminist shared leadership pose the operating foundations. As my research question revolves around how outdoor recreation can specifically become a feminist space, I was interested in further understanding what makes FHC and its work feminist.

Ria highlighted:
The overarching aim is working towards a feminist reality where we are trying to come up with systems and ways of working, especially ways of leadership, that transform, challenge, and dismantle capitalist, racist and patriarchal structures.

This, for Ria and the FHC, can only be achieved as a collective, where everybody is involved in the co-creation of a feminist space.

While this answers the question in regard to the Feminist – Collective character, how does hiking contribute to this co-creation? At the beginning, the hiking element came into the conversation as both hiking and the outdoors were a shared passion and interest among the co-founders. Though, similarly to this thesis purpose, this passion evolved into a deeper reflection and de-construction of how hiking represents a political, embodied experience that some people have the privilege to access, whereas others on the basis of their gender, race, class, body ability, might not be able to. Ria further elaborated:

*How can we make hiking a feminist act, how can we build collective feminist leadership through hiking and through our relationship with nature? How can we unlearn the idea that hiking is about always reaching the top, always being the fastest, always about competition? How can we build an embodied collective experience through hiking?*

Hiking thus becomes a feminist act, of resistance, of actively challenging intersectional oppression, of being present in the outdoor, and above all a feminist act of co-creation of social change. Though, how to do this?

Ria highlighted that since 2020, much of the FHC’s work has revolved around building the ethical and ideological foundations of the organization with different research projects. One of the earliest projects was called “The Reflection Project”, comprising different dialogues with feminist organizations and movements. Ria highlighted the work done with Srilatha Batliwala in forming the knowledge and politics behind FHC, inspired by feminist popular education and the idea of creating social change through our own lived experiences. Another project, called “From Me to We” aims at mapping different practices of feminist collective leadership, engaging with other organizations and movements in the co-creation of best practices and key learnings. Similarly, the project “Building We” also aims to explores best practices of participatory collective governance, not based on capitalist hierarchical centralized leadership. Overall, Ria highlighted the importance of these research projects for FHC, though also remarking, as many other grassroots organizations, the scarcity of funding as the main operational constraint. This has also represented the main reason why organizing hiking programmes or retreats was not as straightforward as initially thought.
Although, this has recently changed. In fact, in September 2023 the first Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat (FHHR) took place in the Italian Dolomites, funded by the Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Rights Feminist Innovation Fund. Before digging into the key element of the retreat, I had an interesting exchange with Ria in regard to the question “to whom” both FHC and its retreats are addressed to. To some extent, this is the question I have also struggled to determine an answer to, within this thesis’ purposes. On one hand, on the FHC website, it is stated how FHC “hikes and collaborative projects aim to include people of any gender”, though also focusing “on the inclusion of those identities (not only gender) most marginalized and discriminated by the patriarchal system” (Feminist Hiking Collective, 2023). On the other hand, the applications for the retreat were opened to young women and non-binary activists. Thus, the key question that arose was how to balance the aspiration to make outdoor recreation more inclusive for everybody, while also making sure that we do not lose the focus on the most marginalized identities who are prevented from accessing the outdoors due to intersectional oppression. Ria’s elaboration on the matter was truly the answer I had been looking for:

*While we as FHC would definitely like to have a space where everyone can join, we also acknowledge there’s also the need to co-create a safe space for women, self-identifying women and non-binary people because they are the ones who often don’t get access to hiking spaces. Even when these spaces could be there, they might be trans-exclusionary, or they might be focused on competition and individualism – which we don’t want.*

It is nonetheless important to acknowledge, as Ria highlighted, that

*Sometimes if cismen are in the space, it could become an unsafe space for other identities, no matter who the man is. Sometimes the simple presence of a cisgender man can alter the experience, and especially the way other identities speak about their personal experiences.*

This is why, in order to create and co-create a safe space, the participation to the first Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat had to some extent be limited, focusing on women and non-binary activists working at the intersection of queer and environmental justice. FHC received around 70 – 80 applications, and Ria remarked how the selection process was extremely hard, especially because the activism element was strong in most applications. In the end, Ria highlighted how the results were highly determined to the following key questions:

*Why do you feel you need to heal? What do you need to heal from?*

This is because
the whole purpose of the retreat was for activists who are burned out, who needed a space to heal and to reflect, to rejuvenate, for regeneration as well.

I was curious whether there was pattern between the participants on what they felt they needed to most heal from. Indeed, Ria confirmed a shared feeling of burnout among not only participants but also the organizers, stemming from activism, unpaid and invisible labor,

*The amount of work we face and also the lack of support, the lack of funding, the lack of recognition and neglecting the importance of social transformative justice work that we do as activists; the lack of safe spaces to be able to have these conversations, and also even the lack of understanding of how we really need spaces like the retreat in order to heal as activists.*

The opportunity to participate in the Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat came to many participants as a surprise, some even wondering whether it was actually real especially due to the availability of full funding, which also served as guaranteeing the possibility to participate for people who can’t afford the huge sums some organizations require.

On the structure of the retreat, Ria highlighted two overarching themes, collective leadership and healing, and the activities inspired by principles of feminist popular education. The first activities were focused on setting the groundwork for the creation of a safe space, thus focusing on interpersonal relationships, on connecting, and on sharing strategies for change. Rather than a front lecture approach, Ria remarked that the activities were designed so that everybody could learn from each other, including FHC organizers, as to truly contribute to the co-creation of a shared safe space. In terms of more physical grounding activities, stretching and breath-work were included, and most importantly hiking. These activities were found way more powerful because of the special settings, surrounded by natural landscape of the Italian Dolomites. This triggered another question, whether the results of the activities would have been different if located in another setting, like a city. Ria remarked?

*I think I can speak for everyone when I say it would have been so different. Of course, cities can a be a space where so many different ideas and tools can come together, especially because of the diversity of people and ideas. But I think the setting of the retreat was particularly useful, especially for the main theme of healing. The place we were felt safe, there was no one else around, just us and the trees and the mountains. It felt like home, but at the same time it was an opportunity to take ourselves out of the space where we usually are.*

Being the outdoors setting so powerful, I wondered whether this triggered more deeper reflections also in terms of our relationship with nature and the natural environment. Ria
explained that indeed engaging in some activities focused on gratitude towards ancestral wisdom and practices concerning nature facilitated the discussions and exchanges on the role and our relation to nature, and in general on environmental justice. Ria

*Nature is not there for us, we are just one part of it. I think especially the physical activities, like the embodiment, the presence, the stretching, triggered a lot of reflections about nature, how we viewed nature and the way we are situated in it differently. I think within cities and spaces far distant from nature, the perception we have of nature is very different, it's completely altered, something that is just there, separated from us, that you know you can go into when you want a break, but there's no strong relationship. Most of us came from some sort of city, and I think how this perception of nature changed throughout the week, shifting to viewing nature as something we are just one tiny piece of.*

This also connected to the collective feminist leader, to questioning how we perceive ourselves within the larger framework of society and leadership structures, and our relationship to the environment, still perceived what we humans can extract from it.

Finally, I was also interested in understanding the final feedbacks on the retreat by the participants. While a detailed booklet on the retreat will soon be published on FHC website, Ria shared:

*Overall, feedback was extremely positive. We all wished it would have been longer, as this kind of work, of digging deep and of having these discussions, it requires not only a longer amount of time, rather also it requires building interpersonal relationships as foundations to support and to able to share discussions and learnings, to build the trust and the accountability with each other.*

The retreat also triggered further questions on the next steps:

*How do we continue this work when we don’t have a physical space with each other? How can we find space to be able to do something like this for longer and with more people as well? How do we break the barriers of scarcity and lack of funding as well?*

Ria for now shared the Feminist Hiking Collective upcoming next steps: building upon the knowledge and experience of their first Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat to hopefully, funding permitting, develop new hiking programmes; focusing on targeted and constructive projects as to prevent the burnout of FHC volunteer-based members; and most of all, trying to build a more physical, in-person feminist safe space.
5. Discussion

Accessing any form of leisure and especially outdoor recreation is not discretionary – rather, it is highly determined by our own positionalities and privileges, that is whether we are subjected or reproducing intersectional oppression. Outdoor recreation is thus political. I hope though that is by now clear that focusing on the *us*, humans, only provides one side of the story, which does not acknowledge the more-than-human. In previous examples, I’ve highlighted the impact of outdoor recreation, especially in the “pristine” area of the Himalayas, in terms of environmental degradation and environmental destruction, to some extent, though, perpetrating what Neimanis et al. (2015) have defined, as abovementioned, the problem of negative framing. This is why it is become important in this discussion section that I shall partake in creating new social imaginaries, “a way of imagining nature, including those forms of social and individual practice which are ethically proper and morally right with regard to nature” (Neimanis et al., 2015, p. 81). This, Neimanis et al. (2015) argues, would also require new model of ethics, an ethics that

*would recognize the necessity of re-imagining the relationships between humans, other animals, waters, lands, and other “Earth others” as a cornerstone of continuing to live well with all of these “others” on a changing plant* (p. 83).

So how can outdoor recreation, inspired by the Scandinavian concept of *friløst liv*, inspired by new feminist environmental imaginaries, become a feminist space for resistance against intersectional oppression?

I already highlighted in previous sections how the never-ending levels of land expropriation and urbanization have led to the enclosures of the commons, further severing the community ties revolving around their preservation. This physical distance between the humans and the more-than-human translates into intangibility, understood both as the difficulty of understanding and acknowledging the existence of the natural environment, but also the difficulty to comprehend anthropocentric-induced phenomena such as climate change or slow violence. This intangibility, as Neimanis et al. (2015) argue, “leads to alienation” (p. 74), understood equally in Marxist terms, and as a form of disengagement from environmental issues.

This is exactly where outdoor recreation comes into the discussion. Outdoor recreation actively requires *us* humans to engage with the more-than-human, natural environment. The
benefits of this engagement are well-established evidence, including “supporting physiological, psychological and cognitive wellbeing through improved air quality, greater physical activity, social contacts and reductions in stress” (Colley et al., 2022, p. 1). Though, this engagement must consider the degradation we actively cause of the environment. This is where two key elements become crucial. Firstly, outdoor and environmental education, as this cannot “only provide opportunities to learn about the environment and webs of connections, but also can foster understanding of health and wellbeing for human and non-human and their interrelations” (Humberstone et al., 2018). Secondly, the Scandinavian concept of *friluftsliv* also become a great source of inspiration.

The first written appearance of the concept *friluftsliv* can be traced back to Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s epic poem *Paa Vidderne*, translated as “On the heights” (1859). The dilemma encountered by the protagonist, a young farmer, is the following:

*should he take over the farm and continue in his forefathers' footsteps, lead a life in the village as the neighbors expect him to do, or live the free life of the hunter? Is it wise to follow his inner voice for his calling in life?* (Elgvin, 2009)

Ibsen’s young farmer solves his dilemma “through his solitary challenges in the wild and deserted nature”, achieving “a deeper view of life’ and an existential independence” (Gurholt, 2008, p. 60). This clearly emerges in Ibsen’s writing (1859):

*I den øde Sæterstue \ Al min rige Fangst jeg sanker; \ Der er Krak og der er Grue, \ Friluftsliv for mine Tanker [In the lonely mountain cabin, \ All my rich catch I gather; \ There is joy, and there is shiver, \ Friluftsliv for my thoughts] (lines 226-229).*

In this key passage and line 229, the first appearance in Norwegian literature of the word *friluftsliv* emerges, initially “combining “three separate words: “free”, “air”, “life” “) (Elgvin, 2009). While this concept seems universal and equally applying to everybody, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences Professor Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt argues that a more socio-historiographical reading of the concept is needed, revealing a more complex phenomenon and “an example of long-standing Western discourse linking ideas of nature, gender and education” (Gurholt, 2008, p. 55). In Gurholt’s opinion, Ibsen’s first interpretation is enshrined in both “the new bourgeois masculine ideals” and “the new aesthetic and adventurous view of nature”, both “in the process of developing in Norway as elsewhere in Europe around the middle of the nineteenth century” (Gurholt, 2008, p. 60). Gurholt (2008) poses the attention on the sharp distinction in Ibsen’s poem “between what is masculine and feminine”: the former “symbolized
by the heights [...], freedom, God, the individual, [...] and ego-forming life in a wild nature” while the latter “symbolized by down there, [...], at home, unfree, bodily nature, the other, the masses and with inferiority, contemptible, domestic life” (p. 60). While Ibsen’s work represented the first step, however the mainstreaming of the concept friluftsliv in Norwegian society should be attributed to Norwegian scientist and polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen. Its interpretation of friluftsliv was highly influenced by so-called social Darwinism, a survival-of-the-fittest translated from the biological realm to the social one. Gurholt (2008) further highlights how “one ongoing theme in his accounts is the conquest of nature”, explicitly linked to “images of virile men” (p. 58). Rather than a universal, neutral concept, it is important to acknowledge the complex history of friluftsliv and its different entanglements perpetuating different intersecting discrimination.

Nonetheless, what I am interested in highlighting here is what Gelter (2000) defines the philosophy of genuine friluftsliv, meaning “a view of oneself in the more-than-human world” (p. 82), and especially the need, that Gelter (2000) highlights, to re-learn “how to relate to the more-than-human world by experience” (p. 83). Friluftsliv is also part of the Swedish school curriculum, integrated in the physical education and health subjects. Though Jonas Mikhail (2019) highlights how the current tradition friluftsliv curriculum is conservative “in the sense that it embraces a view that is not up-to-date with what is happening globally” (p. 85), meaning the increasing levels of environmental damage. This is why Mikhail (2019) argues how the current friluftsliv curriculum must be integrated with a “place-responsive pedagogy”, meaning

> a practice that pays particular attention to the empathetic response to the cultural, historical, and ecological conditions of place(s), and also how people perceive, enact and embody place(s) (p. 86).

This is how friluftsliv can integrate outdoor education in challenging anthropocentric worldviews, “taking on the role of the nondominant to bring place to the fore” (Michael, 2019, p. 86). This is also how this specific understanding of frilusftliv is what I hope can inspire outdoor recreation to become a feminist space for resistance. Though this can’t be limited to the school curriculum, rather it must expand outside formal education.

This is what the Feminist Hiking Collective actively does. Outdoor recreation can become a feminist space for resistance when it actively aims to dismantle hegemonic intersectional oppression, when it seeks “multiple ways to change the material conditions of women’s (and other marginalized groups) everyday lives” (Parry, 2014, p. 352). Though the characteristics
of this space cannot be dictated nor imposed with a bottom-up approach. Rather, to define this space shall be an act of co-imagination, of co-transformation, and foremostly, of co-creation. Though for this “co” to become reality, there’s the need to firstly focus on individual agency. On critical theorists, Beal (2018) writes

*Importantly, critical theorists aim to promote social change. They believe that people have some degree of individual agency, some power to counteract the dominant groups' knowledges and positions. One social change strategy is to demystify the "objective" or "neutral" position of the dominant group. This is frequently done by empowering marginal groups to find and trust in their own "voices" (p. 230).*

This is why grassroots organizations as the Feminist Hiking Collective (FHC) are so crucial. Firstly, by focusing on hiking, by making hiking political, FHC supports the participation of people who the dominant group wouldn’t consider appropriate to be in the outdoors, whether in terms knowledge, technical skills, or as already demonstrated, because of gender, class and race. Their recent Feminist Hiking Healing Retreat was a clear example of how this participation is fostered. The foundational work of this retreat, as the name suggests, revolved around healing, especially from different kinds of burn out. And what is burn out if not another means to sustain hegemonic power, to deprive marginalized people of the energy to counteract dominant narratives? It is exactly within healing that agency can arise. It is with healing ourselves, with trusting our own voices, that we can start building the interpersonal relations to actively co-create new imaginaries. Though the more-than-human cannot be absent from these new imaginaries. We, humans, need the more-than-human to heal. In “Eternal Echoes”, Irish author John O’Donohue (1998) writes:

*Perhaps nature senses the longing that is in us, the restlessness that never lets us settle. She takes us into the tranquility of her stillness if we visit her. We slip into her quiet contemplation and inhabit for a while the depth of her ancient belonging. Somehow we seem to become one with the rhythm of the universe. Our longing is purified and we gain strength to come back to life refreshed, and refine our ways of belonging in the world. Nature calls us to tranquility and rhythm. When your heart is confused or heavy, a day outside in nature’s quiet eternity restores your lost tranquility.*

It is by acknowledging the importance of the more-than-human in supporting our human healing from daily alienation, that we also come to acknowledge the importance to heal the more-than-human, to let nature heal, to engage sustainably and ethically. This is the key - this is how outdoor recreation can truly become a feminist space for resistance, in response to all oppression perpetrated against all non-humans.
6. Conclusion

Drawing inspiration from feminist environmental (post)humanities and critical theories, this qualitative case-study research deconstructs the discretionary character of outdoor recreation, redefining it in terms of hegemonic intersectional oppression. Once deconstructed, the study takes into consideration how outdoor recreation, inspired by the Scandinavian concept of *friluftsliv*, can become a feminist space for resistance. A case-study is presented, that is the Feminist Hiking Collective (FHC) as a feminist, trans-inclusive organization that utilizes outdoor recreation, specifically hiking, as a means of resistance against intersectional oppression. FHC’s recent retreat is highlighted as a practical example of actively empowering marginalized people to co-create and define the outdoors as a feminist safe space. The discussion section further broadens the scope, introducing the concept of friluftsliv, highlighting its historical and socio-cultural entanglements, and discusses its potential as a feminist space. The thesis concludes that outdoor recreation can become a feminist space for resistance, if healing and engagement with the more-than-human become essential components in this transformative process. In line with feminist environmental humanities, this thesis encourages a shift in the social imaginaries to recognize the interconnectedness of humans and the more-than-human world, fostering sustainable and ethical practices, not only in outdoor recreation.

It is worth highlighting a few limitations of the present study. Firstly, this thesis revolves around one particular type of outdoor recreation, meaning walking in the outdoors, and does not consider other types of activities, such as fishing, foraging or hunting. These activities would require a deeper reflection and analysis on ethics and patterns of consumption/extractions. Secondly, this thesis focuses on one case study, the Feminist Hiking Collective, which foremostly operates in a European context, though collaborating with other organizations worldwide. For further developments, other organizations operating outside of this context could be taken into consideration, as to provide a better overview on different experiences (e.g. Free to Run, Indigenous Women Hike). Lastly, it is worth remarking that the topic of disability in outdoor recreation was not taken into consideration for this analysis, as it would have required a more thorough methodological reflection, which for matter of time and length I was not able to provide in this thesis. Nonetheless, I hope that the above analysis could serve as inspiration for further deconstruction - and for further outdoor roaming.
References


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