"Picture perfect" landscape stories: normative narratives and authorised discourse

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Abstract

Despite the positive impacts of an increasing number of organisational initiatives and campaign groups, unequal access to the countryside remains an intransigent issue. Contesting the countryside's normative associations is thus not just a conceptual challenge but a practical one for organisations managing rural sites. Taking the National Trust-run site of Wembury in Devon, UK, as a case study, I use critical discourse analysis to uncover institutions' (including the National Trust and other charities, news media, and factual programmes) and individuals' (using TripAdvisor data) discursive constructions of the landscape. Emerging themes include discourses of place, activities, and people, that – despite some dissonance and seeming contestation – cohere and (re)produce ideologies based on normative narratives of rural landscapes. I suggest the potential value of discourse analysis in surfacing rural storyscapes, and leveraging them to disrupt discourses which further exclusionary ideologies, as a tool to enable locally contextualised, practical means of advancing inclusion.

Keywords: discourse, normative, inclusion, rural, 'authorised heritage discourse'

"With its beautiful beaches and an island called the Great Mewstone just a stone's throw off its coastline, Wembury Point is picture perfect" BBC Countryfile, 2019

Introduction

Free of charge, open 24/7, underpinned by public roads, footpaths and bridleways: equality of access to much of the UK's countryside should seemingly be unconstrained. Yet fewer than 3% of visitors to the UK's national parks are from ethnic minorities (*The Guardian* 2021); people who have physical or learning disabilities, who are working class, or who possess other characteristics that are often marginalised, are under-represented in visiting the countryside (Natural England 2015, Lee *et al.* 2017). Although visibility of the issue is increasing, particularly due to campaign groups and support networks (e.g. Black Girls Hike, Queer Out Here), inequality of access to the countryside remains an intransigent problem, made the more significant by the benefits to physical and mental wellbeing associated with rural landscapes (Colley *et al.* 2016, Currie *et al.* 2016). Indeed, far from simply a neutral space, research has long acknowledged rural landscapes to be culturally constructed (Meinig 1979), and as such moulded in and by the socio-spatial Anglo-American imaginary. Ideologically loaded and associated with an ordered idyll of Englishness (Lowenthal 1991, Duncan and Duncan 2003, Watson 2013), this draws on narratives of white (Chakraborti and Garland 2004, Askins 2009, Bressey 2009), heteronormative (Little 2003) cis-masculinity (Saugeres 2002, Little 2007), amongst others. Landscapes can thus '(re)produce certain identities and ways of life, and become a spatial configuration of particular people's legitimacy and moral authority' (Setten and Brown 2013). Identities designated as less legitimate in this configuration are marginalised (Askins 2009) resulting in a normalising process wherein 'power hierarchies are evident [and] particular arrangements of values, aesthetics and behaviour are considered normal or natural' (Trudeau 2006). Thus narratives

of ‘who belongs where’ are ubiquitous in many rural landscapes (Cresswell 1996). Spatial encodings that designate certain people as ‘belonging’, and others not, are imbricated in societal imaginaries to create ‘durable “schemes of perception” that have an ideological dimension’ (Cresswell 1996: 64). These schemes are contingent on time and place (Massey 2005), on the individual (Butler and Sarlöv-Herlin 2019), nor are they fixed (Cresswell 1996); but they are nevertheless intransigent, evidenced not least by their continued and seemingly unwaning existence.

Since spaces are culturally and socially constructed and therefore not neutral (Massey 2005, Byrne and Wolch 2009), the utility of a discursive approach to landscape analysis has been widely noted (Barnes and Duncan 1992, Jones 1995, Stokowski 2002, Weber 2016). The discourse comprises not only the signs and symbols associated with a landscape at the lexical or image level (Stedman 2002), but also the stories attached to it, which ‘order reality by imposing causality (and therefore morality) upon it’ (Mitchell and Barnes 2013). Stories constitute a particular landscape by combining ‘diverse narratives and temporal scales with specific tangible locales and elements’ (Heatherington *et al.* 2017); thus producers and consumers can co-create what Chronis has called a ‘storyscape’ (Chronis 2005).

The cumulative effect of these stories of place is the production of overarching discourses which are likely to be imbued with the ideological associations outlined above. This normative collection of discourses has been operationalised in heritage contexts through Laurajane Smith’s concept of authorised heritage discourse (AHD) (Smith 2006). AHD is ‘a hegemonic discourse… [that] validates a set of practices and performances, which populates both popular and expert constructions of ‘heritage’ and undermines alternative and subaltern ideas about ‘heritage’’ (Smith 2006: 11). This concept is increasingly being adapted to a landscape context – notably by Santos and de Los Ángeles Piñeiro-Antelo in this journal (2020; see also Linkola 2015), who suggest the related concept of ‘authorized landscape

discourse' (ALD). Such concepts are useful in furthering our understanding of structural and societal mechanisms at play in landscapes, where '[t]he social and cultural values of place […] become sustained in the language, culture, and history collectively experienced, imagined, and remembered across groups and communities of people' (Stokowski 2002). Inevitably, these normalising socio-spatial configurations have real-world ramifications, evident in the unequal visitor proportions and myriad accounts of negative experiences from people belonging to marginalised groups.

Thus the ideology of landscape is not only a conceptual, abstract issue but a manifest one of social justice. This poses challenges to organisations such as the National Trust (hereafter 'NT')[i] that oversee rural sites (Arora-Jonsson and Ågren 2019). Indeed, as the NT's recent work to counter hegemonic narratives in the context of slavery and colonialism (Fowler 2021) has revealed, replacing the existing narrative with a new one is no simple matter. The weight of existing ideologies is such that even the NT, an institution whose narratives have been intrinsic in forming the AHD (Smith 2006: 132), has encountered resistance in attempting to introduce new, non-normative ones. This in itself points to the potential power of an ALD to manifest explicit attitudes and behaviour, and therefore the need for it to be permeable in order to advance landscape justice. Junjia Ye argues for a more geographical approach to addressing diversity, using the 'geography of structured and structuring practices' to 'think geographically about managing diversity by examining the orientations, intentions and implications of inclusion at the scales of policy and the everyday' (Ye 2019). While discourses as 'structuring practices' in the sense of macro-histories or overarching associations manifest themselves in landscapes in locally shaped ways, there are also *specific* narratives of place intermingling with broader ones. These comprise the landscape biography, emplotted narratives, and an array of differently directed discourses from institutions, visitors, and across media and culture. If landscapes are comprised of

stories both hidden and surfaced; and if though intransigent the overarching ideological discourses they create are contingent and malleable, it is worth exploring with practical intention whether leveraging these building blocks could contribute to making the countryside a place that is ‘for everyone’ (National Trust 2025 strategy).

In this article I explore site-specific landscape stories as a means of advancing landscape justice, using critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003). I aim to explore, first, whether a seemingly innocuous, ephemeral storyscape can comprise an ALD and, if so, what narratives are manifest within it; and second, the nature of its construction and maintenance by discursive actors. This analysis comprises the first phase of a larger research project that encompasses dynamics of power and privilege in constructions of landscape to identify practical steps to ensure the countryside is indeed ‘for everyone’.

Materials and methods

In this analysis I proceed from the perspective that landscapes can be viewed as social practices that are therefore discursively constructed (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988, Barnes and Duncan 1992); and that in this construction lies the building blocks of the hegemonic narratives that form the socio-spatial associations described above. Critical discourse analysis is particularly concerned with ‘the effects of texts in inculcating and sustaining or changing ideologies' (Fairclough 2003: 9); that is, taken-for-granted norms and assumptions via ‘representations of aspects of the world which […] contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation’ (ibid.; Weber 2016). It is therefore an apt method to explore how hegemonic narratives are comprised, by analysing language at a micro level and relating it to social context (Fairclough 1995) and the relationships and dialectics between different discursive actors (Fairclough 2003).

To explore how discourses specific to a particular landscape might function in relation to normative values, I focus on the NT site of Wembury in South Devon, UK. Wembury is a rural, coastal location fewer than ten miles from Plymouth, the largest city in the region; one may expect some access barriers – such as accessibility and proximity (Black Environment Network n.d.) – to be less salient than locations more remote from cities. The site stretches around a wide bay containing a small island, the Great Mewstone. A thirteenth-century church and mill (the latter now the NT tearoom) overlook a shingle beach, historically home to industries including a pilchard fishery and medieval furnace. In 1928 Wembury was sold by the Langton Estate and converted into Wembury Point Holiday Camp; Wembury cliffs and mill were acquired by the NT in the 1930s. In 1940, Wembury Point – the site of the camp – was requisitioned by the Royal Navy, which built a radar station, observation posts and anti-aircraft guns. In 1956 it established the HMS Cambridge Gunnery School, decommissioned in 2001, and the NT acquired the remainder of the site in 2006 following a national campaign.

To create the dataset, I conducted a Google search for mentions of Wembury, finding them in organisations' online material (NT; South West Coast Path; South Devon AONB; Visit Devon; Culture24), local news media, factual programmes (BBC *Countryfile* and Channel 4 *Walking Through History*), and other contemporary (such as blogs) and archived (i.e. digitised books) material; captured all English-language reviews of Wembury Beach[ii] (N=307) on the travel website TripAdvisor; and transcribed on-site information boards from an in-person visit to Wembury by the author in July 2020. Images and other visual markers as well as text were included (cf. Kress 2011). These were collated into a single dataset and analysed inductively using data coding software MaxQDA to identify discursive themes at textual (micro) and thematic (macro) levels.

This sample provides a broad cross-section of potential discursive actors rather than a comprehensive overview of all utterances that comprise the overall discourse; as such it provides a rich range of readily accessible stories and perspectives (Jaworska and Kinloch 2018) representing the 'popular' and 'expert' discourses described by Smith (2006)[iii]. Since 'texts realize the interests of their makers' (Kress 2011), including unconscious rather than purposive discursive strategies, it is worth noting the overlapping but distinct motivations and epistemologies underlying some of the sources in this dataset. It is impossible to know the precise nature of the interactions and influences between each discursive actor (cf. Fairclough 2003: 11); nevertheless, considering the positionality of these voices alongside the content of the discourse they produce will help to identify how power and knowledge is manifested within the discourse and how these maintain or contest it.

Text produced by the NT not only comprises an authoritative voice in terms of its ownership of Wembury; it fits within an institutional discourse that recalls its foundations amongst the nineteenth century elite (Smith 2006: 27; see e.g. Swensen and Daugstad 2012; Watson 2013). Other organisational sources arguably exist in the same paradigm, albeit with less clear authority over the site stories. For the news media and factual programmes, in discourse analytic terms while media consumers are not passive, particular models are nevertheless set up and communicated by the institutions and individual journalists who produce the stories (van Dijk 1995). User-generated content – such as TripAdvisor – is increasingly widely being used to shed light on heritage and tourism visitor experiences (Munar and Ooi 2012, Jameson 2017, Alexander *et al.* 2018, Hodsdon 2020, 2021)[iv] and the imperative for CDA to embrace new discourses has been acknowledged (Khosravinik and Unger 2015). While the democratic potential of social media in general has been noted (ibid.), and of TripAdvisor in particular as a forum where discursive power dynamics may shift (Lund *et al.* 2018), it is also the case that 'no technology is neutral' (Mansell 2016) and

the social practice of social media discourse is clearly imbricated within, rather than separate from, societal hegemonic discourses. TripAdvisor reviews have been shown to have narrative properties (McCabe and Foster 2006, Vásquez 2012), and while their ostensible purpose is to provide information to prospective visitors, there is also a performative element to do with online identity construction (Litt 2012, Papacharissi 2012) within an imagined community (Kavoura and Borges 2016).

Results

Analysing inductively the stories of Wembury as manifest in the dataset surfaced a range of discursive themes associated with its features and activities: these include personal memories, food, and practicalities. Whilst these themes overlap with the discursive strategies analysed here, for the purposes of this analysis three emerging themes are discussed in detail: stories of place, stories of activities, and stories of people.

Stories of place: nature under threat

Wembury's attractiveness to both potential developers and leisure visitors manifests a strand of discourse that constructs the two perspectives as oppositional. A signboard describes constant threat from development, beginning with the inter-war holiday camps:

> …there were almost 200 concrete chalets, a rooftop roller-skating rink and a seawater lido. […] There were also **plans afoot** to develop the Point **even further** with housing. The war saw the closure of the holiday camps and stopped all other development **in its tracks**. (NT on-site signboard; ***bold*** *text my emphasis here and throughout*)

There is a hint of subterfuge in 'afoot' and 'stopped…in its tracks', personifying development as an insidious, stealthy force while making nebulous the actual actors

responsible. In other sources this stealth transforms to overt threat: the site is '**prey** for developers' saved by the NT in a 'bloodless **coup**' (Cowan 2006 [Culture24]) from an unspecified opponent. HMS Cambridge's closure '**brought great uncertainty** and **memories** of the **vast** housing estates that had once **been planned** resurfaced' (NT signboard): it is unspecified for *whom* exactly the uncertainty and memories arose, and again development is a faceless force, 'vast' evoking the spectre of not one green inch remaining. Now 'in safe hands' the NT acquired the site 'with **support from thousands of people**' (NT signboard), constructing the acquisition as a unified community's victory against powerful destructive forces.

Another discursive construction of these oppositional forces is counterfactual imaginaries. On-site signboards present an alternative world, where 'Wembury beach […] **could have been** covered in concrete' and 'Just a few years ago the views […] **would have been** obscured by the military buildings', people literally marginalised by infrastructure: 'this stretch of coast path **was once hemmed in** by high military fences, leaving **only a narrow cliff-edge** path for walkers' (NT signboards). Similarly, Wembury Point Holiday Camp – which pre-dates the military site – 'sprawled' across the landscape, evoking urbanism and unchecked development. The counterfactual development threat is vividly manifest in a local press article in an artistic recreation of what docks *would* have looked like, headlined '**Incredible lost plans** for game-changing Titanic dock' and again conjuring an alternative: '**Had the proposal not failed**, then Wembury Bay **would have been** changed forever, with the docks, railway and workers' houses **decimating** what is, today, one of the most attractive and popular coastal areas of the UK' (Abel 2020 [DevonLive]). BBC Countryfile describes the site as having been 'returned to its **former glory**' (BBC 2019) with removal of the military buildings, taking for granted a particular view of the historical context as an idyllic, natural landscape. Yet military buildings and a holiday camp were present for nearly a

century, the medieval furnace and pilchard fishery long before that. This ‘former glory’ is an imagined rather than true reflection of Wembury’s history. Of course, there are reasons to prefer a rural landscape to a housing estate or docks; but while these broad ideologies of preservation and loss are not explicitly exclusionary mechanisms, what they are also not is neutral, since they draw on rural as good, urban as bad binaries, which are themselves layered over assumptions of who belongs in those respective environments (Cresswell 1996).

Indeed, contradictions underlie this imagined rural idyll. The Great Mewstone is now an important seabird nesting site because the military installation there prevented access: ironically precisely *as a result of* the development that is discursively presented as a threat. The discursive construction of the rural aesthetic is dissonant with reality; and other contradictions abound. A Culture24 article at the time of Wembury’s acquisition by the NT notes that ‘the **remaining evidence** of its military past will be demolished in due course’ (Cowan 2006). Yet innocuous traces remain. Rusted posts and a concrete slipway still dot the site. Mostly unmarked, these traces of development are barely noticeable; or signboards vaguely direct visitors’ attention to them: ‘You can **still** see the remains of the pool on the foreshore’ (NT signboard), ‘still’ evoking a sense of deeper time and impending loss.

Remains of a concrete ramp and wooden pier (Photo: L Hodsdon)

This nostalgia within the physical traces is interestingly at odds with the concurrent 'return to nature' narrative, which seems to demand the removal of these jarring traces of development. Other hints allude to this contradiction: one walking route directs visitors 'Past the **strangely** overgrown ruins' (NT website), as though they are a curiosity outside the NT's control. Seemingly there is just the *right* amount of ruins: too few and the history of the site is erased; too many and the site is 'an ugly place' (NT signboard).

Indeed, on-site discourse perpetuates the narrative of return to an imaginary (constructed as historical) pristine wilderness:

> It wasn't exactly a beauty spot when we bought it. […] it was full of **ugly** concrete buildings, roads, and **overgrown scrub** […] Once the Trust had demolished the buildings it left a very raw and **scarred** landscape. It was clearly going to take **a lot of**

work to begin **to attract the wildlife back**. We also wanted **to create some good trails** for people to **use**.' (Ranger quoted on NT signboard)

It's going to take 40 years and maybe longer for Wembury Point to become a **truly wild, natural** headland. We regularly run events and have lots of volunteering opportunities to help **manage** the changing landscape. (NT signboard)

There is an inherent contradiction between 'truly wild, natural' place and the need to 'manage' it and 'to create some good trails' for 'use'. Indeed, the most truly natural feature here is the 'overgrown scrub', yet this is linked with the 'ugly', to be removed. The value system evoked invites the reader to share the NT's perspective and approach. While actively constructing this perspective, it arguably also responds to an existing construction of it in dialectic with the intended audience (Yarwood 2005). Descriptions of naturalness derive more from 'a highly positive visual response to an 'idyllic'-type landscape rather than 'natural' in its strictest sense' (Moore-Colyer and Scott 2005).

This idealised rural imaginary is also visible in the TripAdvisor reviews. These describe Wembury as 'timeless' (TA reviewer, Plymouth), 'Like a time warp... simply lovely' (TA reviewer, Manchester); or link it to a fictional context: 'like being transported to Poldark. I felt like I was swept away to another time - magical...' (TA reviewer, Florida). Several reviewers (N=9) use the word 'unspoilt', inculcated in the narrative of pristine nature that the institutional discourse constructs. Few reviewers demur, but interestingly one who does is familiar with the site, drawing on local, individualistic stories to contest the generic, normative ones with a story in which the NT is in fact responsible for destroying nature by its management:

National Trust run, use[d] to see loads of glow-worms, but the rangers dug the bush up where they are to put in a gate, now no more, typical' (TA reviewer, Plymouth).

Stories of activities: exploration and adventure

Perceived wildness is the focus of another discursive theme evoked in both institutional and individuals' discourse: exploration and adventure. Official websites and signboards are replete with exhortations to 'explore':

> **Explore! Explore!** Use the map […] to **discover the stories** behind the places… (South Devon AONB)
>
> **Explore** the other side of the estuary with a foot-ferry ride .... (NT website)
>
> For the **more adventurous** take the seasonal foot ferry… (NT signboard)

This is echoed in the TA reviews, where any deviation from the immediate vicinity has the potential to be a self-expansive act:

> We visited […] to go on a lovely walk the walk was a bit more than we were used to and **took four hours and was not really well maintained but it was an adventure** (TA reviewer, Plymouth)

For another, this is 'Not a beach to sit at and do nothing - **more the explorers** in the family' (TA reviewer, London). Related is a construction of activities as esoteric, such as marine life 'just waiting to be **discovered by the adventurous** or **those with sharp eyes**' (NT website). Similarly, for TA reviewers, Wembury Beach is a 'hidden gem' (TA reviewer, London), or a secret: 'Don't tell anyone else!' (TA reviewer, Birmingham). The confidential tone constructs the imagined audience as co-conspirators. Although constructed as transgressive, 'exploring' is nevertheless a normative practice, perpetuating what Edensor describes in relation to walking as a 'a regular and routinized choreography' (Edensor 2000); whilst making, too, assumptions about the intended audience's physical capabilities (Stanley 2020). The contradiction between the semantic associations of exploration and secrecy with the ordered and popular behaviours they in fact describe creates an impression of contestation and independence where in fact ideology is being reaffirmed.

Indeed, alongside discourses of exploration in hidden realms are more explicit constructions of a prescribed visit. NT materials use imperative verbs to direct activity: '**See if you can catch** any sea bass' (NT signboard), or 'From the twin posts […] **pause for a minute to look out** across the meadow' (NT website). Signboards declare, using unmodalised verbs, that the site '**is for quiet** public enjoyment and **is a haven** for wildlife'. This discourse of "correct" behaviour, communicated through imperative verbs, is also seen in some TA reviews. One warns readers to '**Watch out for** the tall, blonde local who takes her [dogs] for a walk' (TA reviewer, n.p.); there is interchange between reviewers about whether litter bins should be provided, or dogs allowed on the beach; one instructs visitors '**please take** all litter home with you' (TA reviewer, Wembury). Other activities are mentioned so often that further reviews seem almost obliged to refer to them: 'rockpooling', in particular, occurs often in the TripAdvisor reviews and the NT's website.

Thus normative expectations of what one is 'supposed' to do here are discursively maintained. As Cresswell notes, places 'structure a normative landscape – the way in which ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate are transmitted across people' (Cresswell 1996: 9), including how to act and behave. Since 'many open spaces are only deemed appropriate for "quiet enjoyment" […this] by implication serves to exclude those practices and people who are noisy and collective' (King 2004; Stokowski 2002). And so both institutions and individuals set discursive expectations for sanctioned activities within the rural landscape. People finding themselves 'out of place' in this ideologically loaded landscape are arguably likely to feel compelled to modify their behaviour (Hunziker *et al.* 2007), or not to visit at all. Imbued with the values and preoccupations of a particular hegemonic concern, even seemingly innocuous narratives may thus impact who is visiting.

Stories of people: "Black Joan" and other Otherings

The final discursive theme described here pertains to the people of the site, centring around the Great Mewstone. Adjectives used to describe the island are notably varied. It is 'mysterious' 'impressive', 'infamous', and 'striking' (NT); 'out-of-bounds' (Plymouth Herald) and 'distinctive' (BBC). NT discourse builds on these descriptions to create mystery in the island stories it tells: 'The Great Mewstone is now a nature reserve […] **but did you know** that people once lived there**?**' Another juxtaposition of culture and nature, here a liminality is implied in the portrayal of the inhabitants as curiosities. The first inhabitant was a literal outcast:

> In 1744 a local man was found guilty of a minor crime and sentenced to be 'transported' to the island for seven years**!** He stayed there with his family for the entire time, **not once returning to the mainland.** (NT website)

The exclamation mark along with the detail that he never returned serves to underline his transgressiveness. The story continues:

> His daughter, **known as 'Black Joan'**, remained on the island, married, and raised three children. (NT website)

The exact phrase 'known as "Black Joan"' is so ubiquitous in a range of sources (e.g. Plymouth Herald; South Devon AONB), that it becomes almost a cliché. The phrase's linguistic solidity no matter its context functions to distance authors from agency in constructing Joan as an individual. It is unclear whether 'Black' in this context is a racialising term (in an engraving in Baring-Gould's 1895 story of the Last Smuggler[v] she is apparently white)[vi]; but, notwithstanding its original intent, in the absence of any other explanation 'Black' *does* now have great semantic potential to function in this way. Indeed, Joan's story is associated with racialised and othering details:

> … Black Joan got her name following **a fight in a local pub**. During a **drunken** argument with a **Jamaican seaman,** she drew **her pistols** and, with both barrels, shot him through the head… (Channel 4 n.d.)

Purporting to describe her name's origin, this extract in fact does no such thing: it simply evokes transgressive behaviour and draws attention to the racial identity of her victim to further construct a context outside majority, hegemonic society. The origins of this characterisation by otherness are reflected in contemporary accounts that state '**There was once a black man** on [Looe] island' and describe Joan's transgressive absence of femininity ''Sometimes **her dressed as a man**, and her'd **work like a sailor'** (Baring-Gould [1895] 2016) or inhumanity – 'as wild as their companion seabirds' (Salmon 1910); or conversely a dangerous excess of femininity by seducing a customs officer (Baring-Gould [1895] 2016).

The latter quotations are of course 'of their time'; but it is interesting that no modern account genuinely questions why Joan is called 'Black', interrogates the racialised details in the re-telling, or wonders what her own story might be. Instead, the sources in this dataset continue to draw on the same tropes of otherness as earlier accounts (perhaps even with echoes of Joan '**raising** her young' (Baring-Gould) in '**raised** her children' (NT website): as opposed to the Wakehams, subsequent (non-racialised) inhabitants who '**set up home'** (NT website)). Semantically ambiguous and vacuous, her fossilised description is a constitutive part of a narrative constructed upon otherness and transgressive bodies. It becomes clear, then, that 'mysterious' and 'infamous' are transferred epithets referring to the inhabitants of the Great Mewstone themselves. This discursive strategy aligns with the idyll of the previous themes, since 'To acknowledge that rural, and not just urban, England sits upon such a multi-cultural foundation' would 'disrupt the positioning of 'visible minorities' as 'in place' in the urban, but 'out of place' in the rural' (Bressey 2009: 389). The absence of plural voices in the

text instantiates a lack of dialogicality that speaks to assumptions about the universal (Fairclough 2003: 41ff, Bakhtin 1986) constructed by the institutional actors in this dataset.

Other than stories of 'Black Joan', race is manifest at Wembury, as in many other rural places, through its emphatic whiteness. Despite proximity to Plymouth, which has a 7% Black and minority ethnic population (ONS 2011), visitors on the very busy day I was there appeared almost exclusively white; a picture represented accurately by the blond nuclear family on the NT's website. Absence itself is a narrative: **'**Landscapes may exclude groups or characteristics from the land, but do so in a non-objective way – those groups or characteristics that do not belong are simply not represented' (Trudeau 2006: 435). At Wembury this absence in the present is compounded elsewhere in the discourse by the presence of the transgressive Other in the past.

Indeed, normative narratives of the 'family' abound in institutional constructions. One report describes **'Families** who were heading towards Wembury beach for some Bank Holiday Monday **fun**' (DevonLive); Visit Devon suggests 'Wembury beach is perfect if you're looking for a great **family holiday'**. Yet only just under half (49%, N=125) of the TripAdvisor reviewers who stated who they were with (N=256) said that they were visiting with family. 32% (N=81) came as a couple, 14% (N=37) with friends, 4% (N=11) on their own, and 1% (N=2) on a business trip. Visiting units thus less resemble the 'typical' nuclear family than might be suggested by institutions' assumptions, even when that visit does include family: 'I recently visited Wembury Beach with **my friend and her father'**; 'We **had the grandparents with us**'; and dogs are mentioned just as frequently: 'We visited […] **with our Beagle'**; 'The **dog has a wonderful time** every time we go'. These more pluralistic configurations of family, friends, and pets seen within the TripAdvisor data sit at odds with the normative constructions of family that appear in the institutional discourse.

Discussion

As noted at the outset, it is well established that ideological imaginaries of the rural abound in Western culture, and the narratives here are no different. Amongst a variety of themes present in the discourse of Wembury in the dataset are discourses that cohere and (re)produce ideologies based on normative narratives of rural landscapes. There are some dissonant narratives: here is a 'truly wild' yet 'managed' place where the most seemingly destructive force, the military base, has in fact ensured a protected haven for nesting seabirds, attesting to the power of the hegemonic discourse to impose itself unseen even when there are other stories to the contrary. There is, too, some variation between discursive actors, explored further below: yet the overarching discourse tends towards unity and the reproduction of these normative narratives across the dataset can be seen to indeed comprise an ALD. The ALD evokes a unity of place that imbues it with more power as a hegemonic narrative due to its cohesive, highly semantically loaded, and authoritative nature. As the range of sources with varying degrees of power, authority and institutionalisation shows, it is not only expert, professional voices that construct the ALD, but other voices join and co-construct it. Despite the potential for democratisation of social media, this analysis suggests that rather than contesting the ALD, individual reviewers by contrast tend to collude with the institutional actors in co-constructing it (Smith 2006: 5) in a shifting rather than linear power relationship (Cheong and Miller 2000).

However, popular discourses are not necessarily reducible to the ALD (Smith 2006), and it is interesting to note where points of deviation do lie. Another strand of TA discourse is preoccupied with practicalities such as the price of parking (two of many possible examples: 'The only reason I don't give 5 stars is because you have to pay for parking… (TA reviewer, UK); 'The National Trust should be ashamed to charge £5 to park…' (TA reviewer, London)). This is consistent with previous research that emphasises TA reviewers'

preoccupation with the practical (Alexander *et al.* 2018b, Stoleriu *et al.* 2019). Nevertheless, 'there is nothing in TripAdvisor that says that reviews of cultural experiences must exclude the aesthetic experience, evaluations of the content…' (Alexander *et al.* 2018b: 4231); rather, the imagined community has *itself* created normative expectations of what reviews will comprise. Here (as well as in the visitor configurations) TA reviewers are speaking to what *they are* experts in – their own experiences – and the community co-creates a contesting narrative of expensive parking (at any rate for those 'outsiders' who are not NT members); and such agency as is available is leveraged by withholding a star rating as in the example above, or recommending alternative parking. Despite this resistance, however, in discursive contexts relating to the landscape itself there is little deviation from the ALD. The data here suggest that these reviewers are to some extent inculcated into the ideological norm; and so an ALD is constructed and continually reconstructed.

What are the implications for advancing landscape justice? That landscapes exhibit and maintain such hegemonic discourses comes as no surprise; as described in the introduction, this has been noted and discussed throughout the last forty years. What is striking is that little appears to have changed throughout this time. Discourse analysis considers discourses important for what they *do* as much as what they *are*, and yet the potential for linking a discursive approach with practical activities is not fully leveraged by organisations seeking to advance equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Working back from what an ALD *does* to how it is locally constructed and maintained can not only confirm what is known about its role in (re)constructing entrenched ideologies, but also yield contextually appropriate measures by which to contest them. Inequality in a landscape context and in society as a whole are of course not separate entities, and a realistic assessment of the scope of possible change is required; yet within an individual site's sphere of influence lies a counterpoint to

ideologised spaces, where 'the fabric of space is so multifarious that there are always holes and tears in which new forms of expression can come into being' (Smith 2006: 13).

Recalling Ye's call for a more geographical approach to addressing diversity, I suggest that viewing a discursive understanding of rural landscapes hand-in-hand with practical EDI initiatives may provide one avenue to contest the ALD and its effects. In one sense, the nuanced manifestations of the ALD here seem innocuous: much of the discourse is not, on the face of it, directly excluding. Will calling a landscape 'natural', when it is not, really impact whether someone will visit a site or not? To consider the impacts of micro-level utterances, we might look to the literature within social psychology on implicit bias (itself drawn upon within EDI practice). This posits that individuals form stereotypes and narratives based on 'micro-messages' (Rowe 2008) that can be equated to individual discursive utterances, which comprise a white noise that subtly, cumulatively ingrains patterns of viewing the world (Banaji and Greenwald 2015). In turn, these patterns are externally manifest in people's beliefs, attitudes, and actions. This too can be reflected in discourse, since 'The power of discourses derives not so much from the abstract ideas they represent as from their material basis in the institutions and practices that make up the micro-political realm which Foucault sees as the source of much of the power in a society' (Barnes and Duncan 1992: 9). And so these emerging discursive themes, co-constructed by institutions and individuals, combine to (re)produce an ALD that can have a manifest impact on visitors and their experiences. How, then, can the ALD as surfaced here be leveraged by organisations to advance a more inclusive, diverse place to visit?

By proactively identifying these specific stories of a landscape, actors may make 'discursive incursions' (Hodsdon 2021) or 'deliberate acts of transgression' (Cresswell 1996: 166ff) into that narrative to contest and so deflate the power of the hegemonic norm. Taking off the 'normative-tinted spectacles' and exploring a plurality of stories – and embracing their

contradictions – is one way in which institutions could counter the structural normativity that imbues the landscape. For example, DeSilvey describes another former military NT site at Orford Ness, where 'a deliberate decision was made to accommodate the contrasting presence of the ostensibly wild and the aggressively technological' (DeSilvey 2017). This approach resisted the norm and instead encountered stories of place on their own terms, a re-calibration to encounter a place in all its multivocality as a potentially enriching narrative, rather than funnelling it into a single ALD. At Wembury equivalent incursions might involve, for example, engaging with the 'Black Joan' story to explore the area's multicultural past; or adding other constellations to the 'family' trope to reflect the plurality of who the landscape is 'for'. In seeking to disrupt normative narratives, we might ask what the effect might be of making proactive, yet subtle, incursions into these narratives: creating discursive storyscapes where pluralistic not monolithic space is emphasised: military *and* natural, industrial *and* quiet.

The effect may (at first) be uncomfortable. At Orford Ness, 'the accommodation of these uneasily paired presences in the landscape can be perplexing for visitors' (DeSilvey, 2017: 88). Indeed, this very discomfort may be necessary for the recalibration of normative expectations. Heatherington and colleagues describe the 'highlighting of time-edges - disjunctions between past and present' as having the potential to create 'a space for the telling of alternative, and sometimes unforeseen, narratives…' (2017: 32); emplaced interpretation 'can be deepened by careful attention to multiple perspectives and to the subtle work of layered emplacement over time' (Mitchell and Barnes 2013); and, '[i]n creating a palimpsest landscape, containing the traces of multiple pasts, with the potential to evoke diverse memories, [organisations] can enhance the time depth of these places, but also […] multiple, changing interpretations' (Heatherington *et al.* 2017). In taking a more questioning view of the landscape stories, and paying attention to the specific, micro-discourses at play rather

than defaulting to the norm, subtle transgressions can be made upon the hegemonic discourse. Over time and at scale, normative associations may become punctured, along with the assumptions of embodied presence, behaviour, and experience, that they imply. Identifying the strands of the ALD provides information enabling it to be pluralised to recognise the stories lying dormant in the storyscape; to act as one way in which narrative can encompass rather than exclude those who have historically been marginalised by discourse.

There are of course limitations to this dataset: the sample is not exhaustive nor can it identify the plurality of ways in which individual actors come into contact with "Wembury". In particular, TripAdvisor reviews are self-selecting and specific to Wembury Beach: future research would benefit from drawing from a larger sample and potentially other social media platforms or visitor surveys. It should also, as will the next phase of this research, build on these findings in-depth with visitors. Nevertheless, given that discursive strands, as expected, conform to an ALD these findings are likely generalisable into other rural sites (although the stories to surface in each will, of course, be different), as can the overarching suggestion to be proactive in discursively unpicking normative narratives and considering them an EDI tool.

This article has argued for the potential value of site-specific discourse analysis in providing an understanding of the storyscapes attached to particular landscapes, and for using this understanding to disrupt discourses which further exclusionary ideologies. In this analysis, stories of Wembury manifest oppositional discourses or counterfactual imaginaries between urban development and rural idyll; conform to expected and sanctioned behaviour even when claiming to transgress it; and draw on atrophied tropes that leave hidden, potentially rich, stories untold. Surfacing these narratives dormant in the storyscape to puncture the ALD can provide another practical avenue for organisations seeking to advance EDI at sites they manage. Most EDI initiatives rightly focus on (internal) organisational culture and processes,

and (externally) on identifying and attempting to remove practical and cultural barriers. But taking the acknowledgement that landscapes are ideologically loaded as a starting point rather than an end point, and using the specific discourse of a site, could counter structural normativity in a core respect. This could provide an additional, fruitful avenue to holistically and structurally re-align the discourse of a landscape, acknowledging the intrinsic linking of social and spatial (Massey 2005).

The stories of a place can help us to understand how people encounter, exist in, and move around in it: each with their own starting points, trajectories, perspectives and embodiments, and connecting – or not – with the stories of the landscape they are visiting. Proactively identifying these stories in order to be able to tell more, different ones could, I have argued, offer organisations another practical approach to inclusion embedded in the specific narratives of particular landscapes by using them to disrupt the hegemonic norm in pursuit of landscape justice.

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[i] The National Trust is a charity founded in 1895 to preserve the UK's historical and natural places and make them available for public enjoyment.
[ii] Wembury Beach is part of the Wembury landscape; while reviews do encompass other aspects than the beach, they are thus not directly comparable with the wider focus of the other sources.
[iii] These will be referred to for simplicity as 'individual' discourses (i.e. those of TripAdvisor) and 'institutional' (those produced by organisations).
[iv] Social media data analysis is an emerging context, and amidst debates as to the extent to which material shared to the public domain may be analysed without explicit consent there is not yet a clear ethical framework for its use, thus a 'situational' approach to ethics was adopted (British Sociological Association 2017). TripAdvisor does not require login and does not entail sharing of sensitive information (as an online chatroom might); and little metadata is available on TripAdvisor. Nevertheless, no personal information was stored in the dataset, and reviews marked only with their location.
[v] Where she appears as 'Black Till'.
[vi] Although there were other terms, 'black' does appear in contemporary accounts denoting ethnicity.